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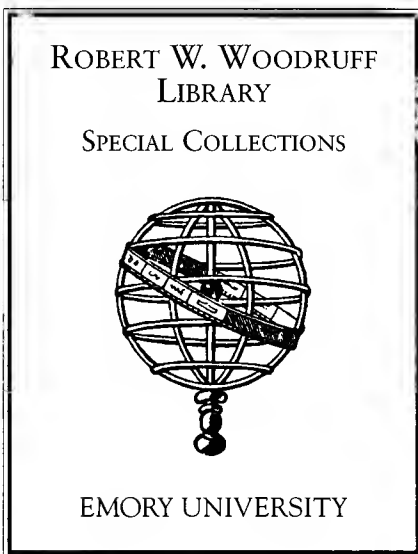
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THE THUMB STROKE.

I.

THE omnibus from the Madeleine to the Bastille was rolling heavily along the boulevards, and "casting clouds of dust on its obscure anathematisers," as poor Arnal said in "Renaudin de Caen"—a vaudeville of thirty years ago. In plain language the heat was intolerable, and as the omnibus was quite full, those who ran panting after it all in vain, were loud in their abuse of the company's monopoly. Deceived in their hopes, these aspirants to cheap locomotion did not even receive the sympathy of the more fortunate persons in the vehicle. On the contrary, they were openly laughed at, especially if they were women, for under the burning sun men were unwilling to get on the top, where they alone have the privilege of sitting.

The company assembled inside the omnibus afforded a pretty complete specimen of the different classes of Parisian society. It is well known that the occupants of omnibuses vary according to the routes traversed. There are aristocratic lines, such as those in the quarter of the Madeleine and the Champs Elysées, magisterial lines as those near the Law Courts and the Chamber of Commerce; neutral lines—half grave, half gay—where grisettes armed for conquest rub shoulders with respectable matrons; such as the Odéon line which, starting from Batignolles, the abode of small freeholders, follows the noisy street of Notre Dame de Lorette, and passing the noble Faubourg St. Germain, ends in the gay and easy-going Latin quarter. Again, there are the thoroughly plebeian lines between Ménilmontant and Montparnasse, which carry workmen in blouses and Mesdames Angots of the Rue Mouffetard to the Halles.

The line of the Boulevards comprises all these varieties; fashionable when it starts from the Madeleine, it becomes middle-class further on, and is wholly given over to artisans at the end. Silks, on this line, never pass the Château d'Eau.

On the day on which this story opens, which was one of the last days of June in the last year of the last Empire, the omnibus No. 119 of line E contained three honest tradeswomen, four grisettes out for a holiday, two third-rate actresses, an artisan, three gentlemen of a more or less fashionable type, and one whose social position it was not difficult to guess.

This last was an old man clad in a long black robe, somewhat worn, and wearing a broad-brimmed hat, black woollen stockings, and heavy shoes with silver buckles. He was a tall thin man, slightly bent with age. His eyes were constantly lowered, and his lips moved as though he were

muttering a prayer—thick red lips they were, and full of good nature when he smiled.

This gentleman, so different from his fellow-passengers, was seated to the right of the conductor's step. His next neighbour was a young man attired from head to foot in a check suit of large pattern, and wearing a light rose-coloured necktie—the costume and graces of a draper's assistant out on leave. Opposite to him was a workman—the only one in the omnibus—firmly seated, with his large fists clenched, and his arms akimbo. From the further end of the vehicle, where the ladies were in a majority, proceeded a chorus of exclamations, accompanied by smothered laughter. This gaiety was provoked by the proceedings of the draper's assistant. The amiable youth was grasping the iron bar above his head firmly with one hand, and with the other was making signs at his neighbour, imitating the gestures of the lazzaroni of Naples, when warding off the evil eye. The young ladies evidently understood this pantomime, for it kept them in a continuous state of laughter.

The old gentleman raised his head, but not guessing the cause of the mirth, he resumed his modest and pensive attitude. This, however, was not at all what the young practical joker wanted, so to advance matters he said to his neighbour—

“Tell me, sir, are you going far like this?”

The old man, astonished, looked at him and replied—“I am going to the Place de la Bastille, sir. May I ask——”

“Why I put the question? It is not difficult to understand. It was because it is somewhat tiring for me to keep my arm continually raised.”

“If I am in your way, sir, I will try to sit closer.”

“No, no, it's not worth while; you are not in my way at all, especially as you are so thin as only to take up half a place.”

“Well then, sir, I do not quite see.”

“What! you don't see that I am grasping the bar, because one must touch iron after touching a priest?”

The old man blushed, but only turned away his head and resumed his prayer. Encouraged by the resignation of his victim the smart youth seized the bar with his other hand, and so roughly that he struck the old man's hat and nearly knocked it off.

No one had the courage to take the part of the priest excepting the workman who sat opposite to him. When the omnibus started, he had also made his examination, and on recognising the ecclesiastical costume it was not exactly a sentiment of sympathy which displayed itself on his honest countenance, but the moment these vulgar jokes commenced the worthy fellow frowned and began to beat time with the carpenter's rule which he held, an evident sign of impatience, and something more. To tell the truth this movement of the rule disturbed the good priest's tormenter a little, and whilst hurling forth his fine sarcasms he could not restrain his eyes from following it. But he took confidence in the thought that the workman must belong to the Faubourg St. Antoine where but little love exists for those who wear a dress “that recalls the superstitions of another age.” He had read this high-sounding phrase that very morning at the restaurant where he dined, and he was only waiting for an opportunity of introducing it so as to excite the admiration of his audience to the highest point. Unfortunately he was mistaken in his calculations, and he had no sooner touched the old priest's hat than the dreaded ruler was raised and this threatening movement accompanied by words as energetic.

"What are you about you young blockhead insulting a poor old man who has done you no harm! But that is enough! Look out for this rule if you begin again."

The dandy would willingly have replied by an insult, but, like Panurge, he had a natural dread of a blow, and so kept silence. He even let go the bar which he affected to hold as a preservative against the contact of a priest.

There may have been others in the omnibus who shared this ridiculous prejudice against the clergy, but the intervention of the workman accomplished wonders. The grisettes ceased laughing and the tradeswoman cast angry glances at the ill-bred joker, who, feeling himself no longer supported, quietly quitted the vehicle.

They had reached the short ascent of the Boulevard Saint-Martin and the driver had put the horses into a walk.

"Stop, please!" cried a woman running towards the omnibus and dragging a child after her.

"There is only one place, mother," said the conductor.

She let go the handrail of the omnibus which she had already grasped, and cried with an air of dismay, "Oh dear me, I shall never catch the train to Nogent."

"Yes, yes, the next one," growled the facetious conductor.

The poor woman who was no longer young seemed worn out with fatigue, and the child which she held by the hand looked ill and could hardly walk.

"Is there any room on the top?" asked the old man.

"As much as you like, sir."

"Then stop, please. I will get up there, and you'll have two places for this good woman."

The conductor thereupon rang the bell and called to the woman, who ran up and said to the priest—"Thanks, kind sir. You are doing me a great service. Ah, if you only knew, perhaps you are saving a man's life."

"Get in, get in, mother; you can talk at the end of the journey," said the conductor, pushing her into the omnibus. "All right above, there?" he added, looking to see if the good-natured priest had accomplished his ascent. "All right! go on."

Public opinion is just as variable in omnibuses as at political clubs, and that of omnibus No. 119 unanimously changed in favour of the old man who had just given up his seat.

"To think that but for this good man the poor woman would have been left in the street," murmured one gossip to her neighbour.

"And she would have missed her train, for the next one starts at five minutes after six, and you may be sure she has not the money to take a cab," replied the other.

"That's true; she doesn't look as if she were made of money."

"Your boy is not very strong, mother," said the workman.

"Ah, don't speak of him," replied the good woman. "I think I shall ever get him home."

"Is he your own child?"

"On my word, no! He is a foundling that I've been to fetch from the asylum, but if I had known they would have given me such a weak little lad I should never have asked for one."

"Well, in truth, he doesn't look strong."

"What could you expect? His father and mother probably didn't have a dinner every day."

"And what are you going to do with the poor little chap?"

"Oh, I don't know. I thought he would help us in the garden, but it seems as if he would rather need our help."

"It was a queer idea of yours, all the same, to take an orphan from the hospital."

"It wasn't my idea. I must tell you, sir, that Pierre and I have no children. Pierre is my husband. But we have a market garden of our own, and we need a lad to water the vegetables and help in digging, and it is not easy to find a lad in the country—they all come to Paris. Well, then, Pierre, who can read, saw in the paper that there were children to be had at the hospital, and no sooner seen than done. 'Jacqueline,' said he, 'go off to Paris and choose a lad.'"

"And is this the one you chose?"

"Ah, I did not choose him, sir; it was the clerk who beguiled me by saying that this boy was not like the others; that he was sickly just now, but that he would soon get over it if we took care of him, and that he was the cleverest and best in the place."

"Well, well, mother, it is not children that are wanting in my house; I've three of them. But what will your husband say when he sees the boy?"

"He! It's easy to see you don't know him. He'll begin by grumbling, and he'll tell me we've no need of a useless mouth to fill. But he isn't the man to send the poor lad away. No, no; he'll say, 'Jacqueline, we wanted a worker and we've got an invalid instead. We'll keep him, all the same, and take care of him. Perhaps he may repay us some day.'"

"Your husband's a good fellow, mother. May I ask his name?"

"Pierre Ledoux, gardener at Charly-sous-Bois."

"Charly-sous-Bois; that is on the Marne, is it not?"

"Yes, good sir; you might say a suburb of Nogent. You take the train to Vincennes, leave Joinville on the right, and then——"

"Good, I know it; I go in that direction sometimes of a Sunday with my wife and children."

"And would it be inquisitive to ask your name?"

"Antoine Cormier, mother, and much at your service if you have business in the Faubourg."

"Have you a business there?"

"I'm a cabinetmaker in the Rue de Charonne."

"That's a better business than digging the ground, I fancy."

"It's not a bad trade, mother; but work is very slack. One works like a slave one week, then on a sudden orders cease, and nothing is doing for a month or two. Ah, I would prefer to dig like your husband."

This discussion on the comparative advantages of a rural life and a workman's life in town might have lasted a long time, for the two speakers were fond of talking, but the omnibus had reached the Place de la Bastille, and the conductor called out—"Change for the Barrière Fontainebleau, Charanton, Bercy, Le Trône!"

"Let us hope the train has not started," cried the peasant woman, jumping on the pavement.

"Good-bye, mother," said the workman, "and a pleasant journey to you."

"Thanks, good sir," replied Jacqueline Ledoux. "Come, Marcel," she added, holding out her hand to the foundling.

Whilst she was getting out the old priest descended with difficulty from the top of the vehicle. Nothing is forgotten so soon as a service rendered

by a stranger, and the countrywoman did not even look at the excellent man to whom she was indebted for not being left behind. He, on the other hand, examined her with good-natured curiosity, and directed his looks especially to the child, this poor sickly little creature, who could hardly stand on his feet, and neither spoke nor smiled. It was indeed piteous to see this lad of twelve with the frame of a child of six or seven, and a thin wasted face, that told of consumption. A philosopher would have cursed the corruption of the large towns which casts upon the world these wretched creatures, destined to misery and early death.

The peasant woman, not noticing the boy's extreme fatigue, bustled about and dragged him after her. She was in a hurry, for the station clock stood at a few minutes before six. The workman went off toward the Faubourg Saint Antoine, but the priest was going to the station, without doubt, for he followed Jacqueline.

They had to cross the Place de la Bastille—a vast esplanade traversed in all directions by large and small vehicles. There were omnibuses going at full speed, and between them glided cabs and private carriages, like fishing boats in the midst of a fleet of men-of-war.

The good woman did not seem very much at home in the art of crossing the Parisian streets, for it is an art, and an art that none but old Parisians possess. You can tell a provincial twenty yards off by his awkward manner of avoiding the vehicles. The boy was certainly a great hindrance, for he stumbled at every step. However, they reached the pavement which surrounds the Column of July in safety, and the woman took advantage of the halt to recover breath. But she saw the inexorable clock, which was just about to strike six, and, spurred on by the fear of losing the train, she set off running again. Unfortunately she did not take her eyes off the clock, and was thus unaware of a carriage turning out of the Rue Saint Antoine at full trot. It was a magnificent landau, drawn by two superb bays. They were right upon Jacqueline Ledoux before she saw them.

"Look out! Look out there!" cried the coachman, pulling the reins.

The good woman lost her head, made one step forward, and then turned and let go the child's hand. The poor little fellow, not being supported, stumbled and fell just in front of the horses, which the coachman could not stop. One second more and he would be crushed under their hoofs. The woman, terrified, dared not move, and the passers-by who saw the accident from a distance could only utter cries of dismay. But the old priest, who was crossing the Place behind the peasant woman, rushed to the horses' heads at the risk of being knocked down himself. The violence of his effort at first caused him to lose his footing, but he had the presence of mind not to let go the reins, and by clinging to them he succeeded in regaining his feet. Then by a violent pull of the bit he turned the carriage aside. The wheels grazed the head of the child, but did not harm him, and the coachman quickly recovered his power over the horses, and succeeded in pulling up, loudly abusing the priest for daring to touch his animals. The old man took the child up in his arms, and then arose a general tumult and universal confusion. The woman, recovering from her fright, cried more loudly than all the others, and the crowd, coming together from all corners of the Place, completely surrounded both the victim and the authors of the accident. Then appeared the uniform of the police, but the workman reached the old man before them. "Bravo!" said he, holding out his hand, "I knew by your face you were a brave man, and I am uncommonly glad I settled that blockhead in the omnibus."

"Thank you," replied the priest, "but help me to carry this dear child, for I think the good woman has lost her head a little."

"What is the matter?" asked a police sergeant, who had at last succeeded in making his way through the crowd.

Of course twenty persons replied at once with twenty different versions of the affair. Whilst the sergeant was endeavouring to obtain a clear account of what had occurred, some policemen approached the carriage to make enquiries in that quarter also. The only occupant of the landau was a man of about fifty, tall and broad shouldered, with enormous red whiskers surrounding a sallow face. He was elegantly dressed in a suit of English make, and wore a small round hat, presenting the appearance of a perfect country gentleman.

"What do you want with me, and why do you take the liberty of stopping my horses?" he asked the policeman curtly.

"Sir, your coachman has just knocked down a child."

"I am sorry for that, but I am in a great hurry, and should be obliged by your making way for my carriage."

"Not until you have given me your name and address."

"My name and address! What business are they of yours?"

"It is necessary I should have them. The mother of the child may want compensation, and one must know where you are to be found."

"Compensation! Absurd! I saw perfectly well how it all happened. The stupid woman threw herself before the horses. She is quite in the wrong."

"Sir," said the sergeant, coming to the help of his subordinate, "It is not my business to decide that; but I must insist on having your name and address, otherwise I shall be obliged to conduct both you and your carriage to the police station."

"Enough! Here is my card," said the gentleman impertinently, and he drew out an elegant card-case adorned with wonderfully elaborate armorial bearings.

The sergeant took the card and read the name, "Wilfrid Wassmann, 44 Rue de Presbourg," and turning his back on the red-whiskered gentleman, said, "Good; you will be written to."

The coachman was only waiting for a signal from his master to drive on, when the peasant woman, approaching the carriage, called out—"There's no need to ask the good gentleman where he lives. I know him well. It's he who has taken the Pavillon des Sorbiers, alongside of Monsieur de Brannes's château, and my husband supplies him with vegetables and with flowers for his daughter."

The sergeant pushed the good woman gently back, thinking her talk would not interest Monsieur Wassmann, but to his great surprise the latter at once changed his manner, and said almost graciously to Jacqueline—"Then you live at Charly-sous-Bois?"

"Yes, yes; I have lived there more than thirty years. I'm the wife of Pierre Ledoux, the gardener."

"Your house is at the end of the village, close to the tavern?"

"Yes, the Café du Grand-Vainqueur, kept by Mademoiselle Rose,—you know where I mean?"

"I think, indeed, I have seen you there," said the gentleman, looking at her curiously. "Are you the mother of the child that fell down in front of my horses?"

"No, my good sir, he's a foundling that I have taken from the hospital, to make a young gardener of him."

"Very good," said M. Wassmann, more graciously than ever. "The accident has somewhat frightened you, and you deserve to be compensated. The child will perhaps need medical advice. Are you going back to Charly?"

"I've lost the train," sighed the woman, looking sadly at the clock; "but I hope to get home in time for supper."

"Very well. My carriage will take me there in less than an hour. You'll hear from me this evening, my good woman.—Go on, Frantz!" he cried to the coachman.

"He is not so bad as he looks," murmured the peasant woman.

"Besides, we know where to find him if he doesn't keep his word," said the sergeant.

This authoritative assurance calmed the wrath of the bystanders, who began to disperse according to the custom of all crowds among whom one always finds less pity for the oppressed than hatred of the oppressors. The majority move quietly off as soon as the oppressor has disappeared, and when all that remains to be done is to assist some poor devil or other, just as the crowd looking at a street acrobat, disperses the moment the poor wretch sends round the hat.

Thus it happened that in a very few moments the child, the priest, the peasant woman, and the artizan were the only persons left in the middle of the Place. The boy had met with no other hurt than a severe fright.

"Fear nothing, my good lady," said the priest; "I'll carry him to the station."

"Thanks, good sir; but it is hardly worth while, since the train has started."

"Don't be distressed at that, mother," said the artizan; "there's another in an hour. Come home with me in the meantime and rest a bit, and have a morsel to eat."

"You're very good, but——"

"But what?"

"It would take too long to tell, but I have my reasons for wishing to get back as soon as possible, on account of my cousin Michel, the gamekeeper of the Count de Brannes."

"Ah! do you cook his dinner for him, then?" asked the workman, laughing.

"No, it's not that; but only imagine! This morning, as I was getting on my boots to go to the station, the postman brought me a letter, and that's a thing that doesn't happen twice a year, for I can't read. Well, as my husband was not there I put the letter in my pocket, and at Paris it occurred to me to ask the clerk at the hospital to read it for me. He read it aloud, and it appears it's from some one who writes me to warn Michel that it's intended to kill him to-night as he goes his rounds in the Bois de la Bélière, which is quite close to the count's château. It made my blood run cold, and you can understand that I am anxious to get back to Charly as soon as possible to save our poor Michel."

"That's a queer story," exclaimed the workman. "What, murder a man! If that sort of thing happens often at Charly I shan't go there to spend my fortune after I have made it."

"Oh, perhaps it's only some abominable practical joke," said the old priest. "Why should they kill this gamekeeper, who is doubtless a worthy fellow?"

"That he is, sir," replied Jacqueline Ledoux. "He served in the

Zouaves, and has a pension and a medal and all. Still, for all that, there are many persons in the country who don't like him because he has to have them up for poaching."

"And who is it that tells you they are going to kill him to-night?" asked Antoine Cormier.

"Ah, as to that I can't say. The clerk told me the letter was not signed. It's an anon—ano——"

"An anonymous letter. Good! Some practical joke to give you a fright. Listen, mother. They won't kill your Michel as long as it's daylight, and if you leave by the seven o'clock train you'll have plenty of time to warn him before nightfall. You've forty minutes to spare before the train starts, and it won't cost you much to give me and my wife the pleasure of a visit; besides which my little ones will be pleased to play for a time with your little lad."

"I don't say no, but——"

"Come, come; I see what it is. You country folk are always afraid of putting yourselves under an obligation. Well, come and see us and we'll return your visit. One of these Sundays we'll come and ask you for a glass of milk from your cow and some of your cherries."

"Ah, well," said Jacqueline, "if you promise to come and have a bite with us at Charly I will go. And then to-night, when I get back, I'll leave the lad in the house,—Mamzelle Rose will look after him if my man is not at home,—and then I'll make off to warn our poor Michel."

"That's all right, mother; so come along to the Rue de Charonne; it's only a few steps off. I hope your reverence will come too."

"Well," said the old man, "I am like this good lady; I've lost the train; for I was also going by the railway to Nogent. So I will not refuse, especially as this poor child has much need of attention."

"We'll attend to him, never fear: but we shall be very glad to see your reverence."

As the house in which Antoine Cormier lived was almost at the corner of the Faubourg they reached it very quickly. It was one of those immense buildings that abound in this industrious quarter. One entered it by a long passage leading to a courtyard filled with piles of red coloured wood cut from the heart of a gigantic tree grown on the banks of the Amazon.

Round this central court there rose high walls pierced by numerous windows. On all sides one heard snatches of songs, joyful cries, the noise of hammers, the grating of saws. It resembled the activity, the restlessness, the noise of a hive of bees.

"You've no stairs to tire you, your reverence, we live on the ground floor," said Cormier, pointing to his workshop at the end of the courtyard.

Then he led his guests in between wardrobes and chests of drawers to a room where three children were playing round a woman who was busy darning stockings.

"Louise!" he said "I have brought you some company." His wife seemed a little astonished but she put down her work and came to welcome her guests.

"I met this lady in the omnibus as she was on her way to Charly-sous-Bois with the boy. He fell in crossing the Place de la Bastille, and would have been crushed by a carriage but for his reverence, who dragged him from under the horse's feet."

"Oh! poor little fellow, how pale he is," said the workman's wife. "It was very good of you sir to go to his assistance," she added to the old priest.

"Come, Louise, my dear," said Cormier, "keep your compliments for by and bye, and give the little lad some black currant syrup; bring us too the bottle of brandied cherries."

"Sit down, Mother Ledoux—and your reverence also; here is a chair holding out its arms to you—there is no want of furniture here, for I make it."

The artisan's wife was still young and had a sweet good-natured expression. Her three children had given over their game. One clinging to his mother's dress followed her about wherever she went. Another was seated on his father's knee, as stiff and sedate as a soldier on duty. The third, a little girl, was examining the little boy from the Hospital with curiosity.

"Excuse me, your reverence," said Cormier, but may I make so bold as to ask you to what parish you belong. Its not in order that I may go there, for I am not particularly devout, but I should be glad to see you again."

"I am not one of the clergy of Paris," replied the old man, "I have been lately called to a small charge near Nogent-sur-Marne, and I was just going there when——"

"Whereabouts is it, your reverence?" interrupted Jacqueline.

"I have been appointed to the parish of Charly-sous-Bois."

"What! you are to replace our old curé who died last month!"

"Yes, my good lady, and after what I have heard, I suppose I have made the acquaintance of some of my parishioners."

"Yes sir, that is so. I'm married to Pierre Ledoux the gardener who lives at the end of the village."

"I shall have much pleasure in making his acquaintance."

"And he'll be glad to see you sir, although——" The pleasant woman paused and one did not need to be over sharp to guess the reason of her silence.

"Yes, yes," said the old priest smiling, "I know that Pierre Ledoux is one of the most honest men in the parish but that he doesn't often go to church."

"What! you know that? then you won't come to see us?"

"Why not? on the contrary I intend to visit you oftener than any of my other parishioners."

"Ah! I'm glad of that, sir. After what you have done for this child, I could never be happy if I saw no more of you."

"Will your reverence drink a glass with us?" said Cormier.

"With all my heart, but first let us look after our invalid."

The workman's wife was already on her knees before the child, warming his poor little hands in hers, and making him swallow a mouthful of syrup.

"How old are you, my little man?" she asked him.

"Twelve, madam," replied the child.

"And have you been ill long?"

"Oh, yes. For many years I could not get out of bed. But I'm stronger now."

"Are you glad you are going into the country with this lady?"

"Oh yes!"

"But you don't know how to dig the ground?"

"Last year I learned to dig a little; but it tired me too much, so the hospital gardener showed me how to water the flowers, and how to prune the rose trees. I can do that, and I like doing it."

"Hum! That's unfortunate," said Jacqueline, "for my husband grows more melons than roses; however, the child can at first occupy himself with our flower garden."

"And you may be sure the pure country air will soon restore him to health," added Louise. "How are you now, my little friend?"

"Much better, madam, and I thank you very much for all your goodness," said the child, raising his large black eyes, full of sweetness and intelligence, to the workman's wife.

"Here's to your reverence's health," cried Antoine, raising his glass, "and before we part please tell us your name."

"My name is easy to remember. I am called Jean."

"But that's your Christian name only."

"I have no other, my friend. I also am a foundling. You see I had my reasons for aiding this dear boy," said the old man with a kindly smile. "But," he added, drawing a large old-fashioned watch from his cassock, "I think it is time for us to be going to the station."

"Yes, yes, let us be off," cried Mother Ledoux. "I don't want to miss another train in case something should happen to Michel. Besides, the gentleman of the Pavillon des Sorbiers said I should hear from him this evening. If it should enter into his head to come and see the child, I must be there to receive him."

"The carriage gentleman! Oh, well. He'll only do his duty if he brings some money for the child that he so nearly killed," said Cormier. "I don't like his looks at all, that gentleman!"

"Is he a foreigner?" asked M. Jean.

"Yes, a German, a 'square head,' as they say, and there are many folks in the country who don't like him over much. For all that he has a daughter as lovely as an angel and as good. She always has a piece of silver for the poor; and then, how she loves flowers! My husband says he sells her more than thirty francs worth a week. They say her father does not make her very happy, and that Monsieur Henri, the son of the Count de Braunes, is madly in love with her; and my cousin Michel, who hates the German, tells me that his master, the count, won't hear of any such marriage. But that's all gossip, and no one has any business to meddle with what concerns the gentleman of the Sorbiers alone."

"A quarter to seven, my dear lady," said the good curé, with the view of putting an end to this flow of gossip.

"Ah! my goodness! make haste. Come Marcel," cried the peasant woman. "It seems that at the hospital they called him Marcel. What a name!"

As the good woman seemed about to recommence her chatter, M. Jean, in order to stop it, held out his hand to Antoine Cormier, who shook it cordially. Louise tenderly embraced the child; and at last they separated, promising each other soon to meet again. This time they were successful in catching the train, and a little before eight o'clock M. Jean, Jacqueline, and Marcel arrived safely at Charly-sous-Bois, hoping to pass a quiet evening after all the worries and troubles of the day.

God alone orders the events of this world, and none of the three knew what was in store for them that night.

II.

CHARLY-SOUS-BOIS—you won't find it in the map—is not a town, but neither is it a village. It is a collection of villas, châteaux, farms, factories, and cottages, all mingled together and cast, as it were, by chance in a

fresh green valley opening out on the right bank of the Marne. It comprises every variety of country house and of country folk. There is first the well-to-do manufacturer in command of a whole army of engineers, foremen, and artisans; then the retired merchant, playing the part of the country gentleman to make up for having had to sell drugs or indiarubber goods for twenty years of his life; then again there is the Paris notary, the owner of a handsome villa in the pseudo-Italian style, where he comes to spend the Sunday, free from office cares and the dust of old legal documents. Again, one finds there the small landed proprietor, whose father had been a farmer in the same district and had left him enough money to live in idleness; he knows no greater delight than to do absolutely nothing with his ten fingers from morning to night, thinking, no doubt, that his ancestors worked for centuries on the land solely that he might be able to take his ease.

Again, there is the real lord of the manor—well born, rich, and well bred—passing the winter in Paris and the summer in an old-fashioned château built in the reign of Louis XV., and restored under Charles X. Such was the Count de Brannes, the noble owner of the park and forest of Chasseneuil and master of Michel, the gamekeeper so hated by poachers and so beloved by Jacqueline. Lastly, there is the peasant, the tiller of the soil; and in this class there are many grades, from the ploughman and the harvestman to the well-to-do farmer who cultivates his own land together with that of others, and the industrious market-gardener who turns his early fruit and vegetables into good Parisian gold.

Among these last was Pierre Ledoux, Jacqueline's husband, a man firm on his feet and strong in his opinions, for he had opinions—those of his newspaper, of course—a hard worker, and hard to himself, as, it must be confessed, he was also hard to others. Everything had to go like clock-work in his establishment, and no one was allowed to interfere in his affairs. For all that, he was an excellent fellow, eating well and drinking better, and talking loudly at the Café du Grand-Vainqueur, which was the rendezvous of all the gossips of the neighbourhood.

M. Jean, the new curé of Charly-sous-Bois, had only been a week in charge of the spiritual welfare of his flock—a flock not always very easy to direct. To fill a benefice in the noisy suburbs of Paris is a very different thing from guiding a quiet country parish. At Charly M. Jean found that he was almost in the position of a missionary sent to convert the heathen in some island in the Pacific, and it was not without good reason that his ecclesiastical superiors determined to place him there. Originally a founding, as he had told Madame Ledoux, M. Jean owed his education to an old priest in Normandy who discovered him one morning under an apple-tree. This priest was a learned man, and what was better, a good-hearted man. He put the child out to nurse at a neighbouring farm, and as soon as he was old enough undertook personally to teach and direct him. The pupil proved an honour to his master, entered the seminary, where he had a brilliant career, and on leaving it was attached to the diocese of Versailles, where he quickly became curate and priest, and where his many virtues and his great learning soon won him distinction. He remained there thirty years. Though he might well have aimed at reaching a high position in the church, he asked as a favour to be allowed to remain a simple village clergyman, and he did so much good in his parish that no bishop thought of removing him. This was only accomplished by a fire which destroyed the parsonage in which he had passed half his life.

At the time this accident occurred M. Jean was sixty years old and his health already very feeble, suffered greatly from the efforts he had made to extinguish the fire.

The village doctor declared that rest and change of air were indispensable to him. In these circumstances the Bishop of Versailles recommended M. Jean to the Archbishop of Paris for the vacant charge of Charly-sous-Bois, where the air was excellent, and the flock of sheep had great need of a good shepherd.

Charly was indeed anything but noted for its sanctity, and the Christian virtues, the enlightened zeal, the bright intelligence, and the inexhaustible charity of M. Jean were by no means too great for the task of bringing back to the fold the lost sheep of this charming village.

The worthy priest accepted this new task bravely, although it was not without regret that he left a neighbourhood which he had made his own, and the honest country folk who had become a real family to him. Poor and full of faith, like the first Apostles, M. Jean took nothing away with him but his breviary and his well worn cassock, and his entrance into Charly-sous-Bois caused far less commotion than the daily walks and drives of M. Wassmann, the wealthy lessee of the Pavillon des Sorbiers.

The first days were taken up by the numerous details incidental to settling in a new house, and the curé had not yet had any time to make the acquaintance of his parishioners. His lucky meeting with Jacqueline, and rescuing the poor child were therefore, so to say, his *debut* in the village, and on getting out of the train at five minutes past seven, the good curé thanked God for giving him an opportuning of commencing his new life by so propitious an act.

The house of mother Ledoux was a considerable distance from the parsonage, which was situated at the other end of the village, so the travellers separated at the station. M. Jean embraced the child and promised Jacqueline that he would call and see her on the morrow, and then bade the good woman good bye, but not without having first offered to carry a message from her to the gamekeeper Michel. The château of M. de Brannes was on the road to the parsonage so it would have been easy for the curé to have taken the message himself, but Jacqueline protested that she would not give him the trouble; she said she would first take the child home, and be with her cousin within half an hour afterwards. M. Jean thought that like a prudent housewife she did not wish to miss the promised visit, and above all the gratuity anticipated from the rich stranger, and as he did not attach great importance to the anonymous warning, he left Madame Ledoux to manage matters in her own way.

By crossing the village he could reach the parsonage in ten minutes, but he preferred to take the schoolboy's road, that is to say, to follow the banks of the Marne.

The day had been very hot and he wished to have a good breath of pure air and enjoy the freshness of the evening and the river before going home.

He had ordered his old servant Geneviève to prepare his frugal supper at nine o'clock, so he had plenty of time to make the round and he followed the shady pathway on the right bank of the Marne.

The night was falling, and the stars were shining out one by one. The only sounds to be heard were the rustling of the willows, the distant song of a nightingale, and now and then in the reeds the movements of an otter seeking its hole.

In spite of his sixty years, M. Jean felt deeply the beauties of Nature, and he fully appreciated all the poetry of this calm, sweet landscape. The

parish which he had left had none of this charm, and M. Jean thanked God for having sent him to Charly-sous-Bois.

Further on the road became wilder, hemmed in as it was by the steep bank of the Marne on one side, and on the other by a wooded height. Soon the curé recognised the wall enclosing the park of the Count de Brannes. He had not yet paid a visit to the château, but he resolved soon to do so, partly from deference to the lord of the manor and partly to beg his aid on behalf of some of his charitable schemes. Although he had only been in Charly a week, M. Jean had yet had sufficient time to find out the poor. Whilst he was debating with himself which day he should choose for this duty, a noise of rustling branches caused him to turn his head quickly towards the wood that bordered the road. It seemed to him that some one was walking cautiously among the trees.

He stopped to listen, but heard nothing more. His thoughts turned instinctively to the gamekeeper, Michel, and the uneasiness of Mother Ledoux regarding that good guardian of the count's preserves. Then, reassured by the hour, which was hardly one for a murder, by the proximity, moreover, of several houses, and by the profound calm that prevailed around him, he continued his walk. He had not, however, gone a dozen steps when a feeble moan fell on his ear. This time the sound proceeded from the side of the river, and was much more distinct.

The good curé advanced quickly and saw below him on the river's brink a woman seated on the grass. The moon was entering on its last quarter, and had not yet risen, but the sky was so clear that one could see more distinctly than one can in the heart of Paris on a gloomy day. The woman was not alone. She had an infant on her knee, while beside her another child, a little older, was lying on the grass and crying bitterly.

"What is the matter, my good woman?" asked M. Jean.

At the sound of his voice the woman raised her head and replied ill-temperedly, "Nothing. Can not one sit down in the open air?"

"You are mistaken if you are thinking I am finding any fault with you," replied the curé gently. "A moment ago I heard a moan, and I thought perhaps you were in want of help."

"I am in want of nothing, and of no one's help."

"But your children?"

"My children need nothing."

"I'm hungry!" cried the one lying on the grass.

"Be quiet," said his mother, shaking him roughly.

"I won't be quiet, I'm too hungry," answered the little boy.

"If you're not quiet I'll tell your father."

This must have been a terrible threat, for the child ceased crying as if by magic.

M. Jean, surprised and touched by this scene, was wondering what to do next, when he suddenly remembered that he had bought two small rolls of rye bread in Paris, and that he still had one of them in the pocket of his cassock. He held it out to the child, who seized it greedily, and bounded to his feet as if afraid that some one would take it from him.

"Mark!" cried the woman, "I forbade you to do that."

But the child, instead of answering, divided the roll into three parts, gave one to his little brother, put the other forcibly into his mother's mouth, and then set to work to devour his own share.

"Sir," said the woman in a mournful voice, "I can't take the bread out of their mouths, but I asked you for nothing."

"I know that, madam, and I am glad it occurred to me that I had the roll, for at least the children will have something to eat. But this is a very frugal meal, and if you will bring them to the parsonage——"

"The parsonage! Then you are the village priest?"

"Yes; and I have therefore a good right to help my parishioners."

"I don't belong to the parish."

"Where do you come from, then?"

"Nowhere," answered the woman bitterly.

"What! you have no home?"

"No. I know that's against the law, and that one hasn't the right to live by chance and sleep under God's sky. Go and fetch the gendarmes if you like. They'll take us to prison, and then——well, they'll have to feed us."

"No, I won't fetch the gendarmes," said the curé smiling; "but though I am neither rich nor powerful I will do my best to help you out of the distressful position to which your misfortunes have reduced you—undeserved misfortunes too, I am sure. One has only to hear you talk to know that you were born in a very different station."

"And suppose I was? What good can my past do me if my children have no other future but to beg in the streets?"

"Why do you despair of the goodness of the Almighty?"

"Because He has abandoned me," said the woman; "because I am no longer worthy of His pity, any more than I am of yours. You would like to know my history. Listen. It is short and simple. It is the history of thousands of unfortunates who like me have yielded to the guidance of their hearts. I was the only daughter of a rich farmer, and I might have lived happily in a place where everyone honoured and loved us. But I left my father to follow a man whom I madly loved. That was fourteen years ago, and for fourteen years not a day has passed that I have not wept for my fault."

"Poor woman, I pity you," murmured M. Jean.

"The man I adored was not content with taking me from my father; he married me, but only to make me suffer all the more. What can I tell you that you do not already guess? My poor father died of grief, and the considerable fortune he left me was squandered by my husband in a very few years."

"And had you not the courage to stop him in this fatal course—the courage to defend your children's patrimony?"

"No; for I loved him, loved him madly—more even than before he had made me his slave. Every time he came to obtain from me a portion of that fortune which should have been sacred to him, I knew he was stealing the patrimony of my children, and cursed my weakness, but I had not the courage to resist; and when I had yielded I vowed to myself that it should be the last time; but he came again, and again I yielded. You see therefore that I am not deserving of pity."

"No, no," said M. Jean, with tears in his eyes; "you do not deserve to be so unhappy, for your faults are faults of the heart. Let those who have never loved cast the first stone at you. But he? He was then very wicked."

"He? Oh, no; he was good. It was pride that ruined him."

"Pride?"

"No; I am mistaken; not pride, for that would keep one from any base action. It was vanity that drove him to the abyss into which he dragged

me with him. He was handsome, amiable, charming; but he wished to make a show, to be brilliant at any price. He sought me because I was beautiful, because I was rich, because in securing me he triumphed over numerous rivals. He has ruined me by addicting me to a luxury that I detested. He has sacrificed our happiness to—— But what does all this matter?" said the unhappy mother. "One day he went away, leaving me alone with my children, without any resources, without shelter——"

"And you have never seen him since?"

"Never. He left France after a—a duel in which he killed a man. And now that you have heard my sad story, listen to a confession which will prove to you that I have deserved my fate. If he were to come back and order me to follow him, if he asked me to give him my life, or the bread of my children, I would obey him still."

"Then you still love him?"

"Yes," said the woman with a wild expression.

A long silence then ensued. The good curé, deeply moved, looked at the strange picture before him—the children lying on the grass greedily devouring the bread he had given them, the mother raising her head proudly as if to defy fate. As far as he could judge she was still beautiful. He saw her eyes shining brilliantly in the darkening shadow—black eyes full of fire, eyes that spoke, as it were. She seemed, too, neatly dressed, and carried what was apparently a guitar slung over her shoulder.

"Sir," she said in a calmer voice, "the wandering life I lead is very hard for my poor children, but don't think that I have taught them to beg, or that I beg myself. I sing in the street to earn their bread."

M. Jean made a movement which she perceived.

"Yes, I know," she said bitterly; "it is a base occupation, but I never learned to work with my hands. I was a good musician, and I had a tolerable voice. It was one means of gaining our bread, and I have taken to it. In winter the times are sometimes very hard; but in summer I go to the different fêtes near Paris, and the sous I get are generally sufficient for our wants. By unusual ill-luck I have made nothing at all to-day; it was so hot that there was no one in the streets of Charly, and when it grew cooler I was worn out with fatigue, for I had been walking all day, and so I stopped here. I tried to sing in front of the château up there, but the servants drove me away. Ah! the rich don't like to see poverty near them."

This accusation applied to M. de Brannes, who was understood to be very charitable, was certainly unjust, and the curé was about to rebuke the poor woman by telling her that one might be very willing to assist the unfortunate and yet not care to encourage the tribe of itinerant vocalists; but he remembered that she was soured by misfortune, and consequently entitled to some indulgence, and further, that it was evidently far more necessary to succour her than to preach to her.

"Madam," he said gently, "in the name of these dear children I ask you not to refuse what I am going to offer. I know some respectable people in Paris who will find you an honourable and remunerative occupation, and who will put your boys to some trade."

"Would they be happier?" murmured the woman. "Is not the free air and the liberty they enjoy worth more than the labour and restraint of a workshop?"

"Work is the law of the world, and no one has the right to disobey it. Think of your husband, who would not have caused you all this misery if

he had loved and practised work; and you will consent, I am sure, to follow my advice."

This time M. Jean touched the right chord.

"I will do what you wish, sir," said the poor woman, inclining her head.

The curé, rejoiced at finding another good deed to be accomplished, was reflecting how to procure the mother and children a lodging for the night, when the clock in the church tower of Charly began to strike with that slow muffled tone peculiar to village clocks.

"Nine o'clock!" he murmured. "It is later than I thought. Geneviève will be getting impatient."

Just then a report from a gun echoed in the silence of the night. The woman jumped up hastily in a fright, her children pressed close to her, and M. Jean could not help trembling. He thought of the warning Jacqueline Ledoux had received, and wondered if the gun had been fired at Michel. After listening attentively, however, he heard nothing further.

A profound silence succeeded the report, which was dying away after being repeated by echoes in the large wood that bordered the river. Then the only sound heard was the distant song of a party of boating-men as they descended the Marne, disturbing the peaceful inhabitants of Charly with their bacchanalian chorus.

The shot had been fired in the wood near the wall of M. de Brannes's park, not more than a hundred paces from M. Jean and the woman and children, but far above their heads, for the wooded slope rose steeply from the roadside. In that direction no sound was to be heard beyond a gentle rustling among the branches of the pine trees planted along the pathway.

"It is only the count's gamekeeper firing at an owl or a weasel to save his master's pheasants," muttered M. Jean, more uneasy than he wished to appear, for Jacqueline's presentiments were in his thoughts.

"Listen!" said the singer suddenly. This time the curé heard very distinctly the crackling of broken branches and dry leaves crushed under foot. Some one was walking cautiously through the wood, and the footsteps rapidly approaching seemed to be taking the direction of the park towards the lower angle of the wood.

"It must be the gamekeeper," said M. Jean in a whisper. "A poacher would never run the risk of following the path by the water's edge. But we shall soon see who it is, for if he does not change his direction he will come out there on our left." And he added to himself, "I shall be glad to meet him so as to give him the caution which perhaps good Mother Ledoux has forgotten to convey to him."

The priest was still speaking when a second shot was heard louder and nearer than the first. It was immediately followed by a piercing cry of agony.

"Ah! Good God!" cried M. Jean, "they've killed him."

"Who? Who?" said the woman, petrified with terror.

"The gamekeeper Michel—the warning was only too true. Ah! the unfortunate woman, why would she take the child home instead of going to the château direct from the train? And it is my fault also. I should have——"

Another feeble cry was heard from the wood. The sound of footsteps at the bottom of the hill had ceased.

"There is a man dying up there," cried the good priest. "I cannot leave him without help."

"I will go with you, sir," said the singer.

"No, no! You can't leave your children, and you must spare them the terrible sight. Stay there with them. I will return when I have seen what has happened, and then if necessary you can go for help to the village whilst I proceed to the château."

And without waiting for a reply, M. Jean, gathering up his long cassock, rushed into the wood with all the ardour of a young man and the courage of a soldier. The woman remained on the river's bank pale, trembling, holding one of her children with each hand. The little fellows did not speak. They pressed close to their mother, and looked at her as if to ask what it all meant.

Meanwhile the scug of the boatmen drew nearer; but silence was restored in the wood, M. Jean was already far off, and the cries for help had ceased. The rising moon was beginning to show her crescent shaped disc above the high trees, and soon her pale light lit up the path, and sparkled on the waters of the Marne.

"Let us go, mother," said the elder of the boys.

"Be quiet," she muttered, putting her hand on her mouth; "be quiet, some one is coming."

There was again a sound of crackling branches, but this time with a violence that announced the approach of a man fleeing in all haste. The singer thought it might perhaps be M. Jean, and she advanced to the outskirts of the wood, but she did not dare to call out.

Doubtless the person who was approaching had heard her crossing the road, and did not wish to meet anyone, for the sound of footsteps grew fainter and fainter although still approaching.

The poor woman, more and more terrified, stooped down to make her children be silent, and crouching with them at the side of the road held her breath. If it was a murderer coming up thus cautiously, she did not wish him to see her. She was reassured by the thought that if this man had really committed a crime, and sought to escape by the river path, he would no doubt turn his back on the village of Charly and the Château de Chassencuil. He would of course be anxious to get into the open country as soon as possible.

She had arrived thus far in her conjectures, when suddenly a man appeared before her, twenty paces off, at the corner of the park wall. She crouched close to the foot of the trees, holding her children tightly in her arms, and waited.

The man stopped a moment before jumping on to the road, and looked cautiously all round. He was too far off, and the moon did not shine brightly enough for her to distinguish his features, but she saw perfectly that he was tall and thin, and wore a blouse and a broad-brimmed straw hat. He carried a gun in one hand, and in the other a pheasant that he had just killed. After a moment's hesitation he emerged from the wood, crossed the path rapidly, and descended to the river's brink. There the woman lost sight of him for a moment, but she soon saw him reappear empty-handed, and as she had foreseen he went off in the opposite direction to the village.

He was walking quickly but not running. He had evidently placed his gun and the pheasant in some hiding place, and having thus got rid of all that could excite suspicion, and believing that he had not been seen, he fancied himself perfectly safe, and judged it useless to hurry.

His behaviour was not that of a murderer, and the poor woman comforted

herself with the thought that perhaps the priest was mistaken, and that the cry, that dreadful cry, which still echoed in her ears, had been uttered by the gamekeeper when making his round simply to scare away the poacher. She was, however, still so frightened that she dared not move, and resolved to remain concealed in the ditch until M. Jean returned. She would certainly have taken flight could she but have seen what was happening in the wood, where all was again silent.

After leaving her, the worthy priest scrambled up the wooded height at hazard. He was at a loss how to direct his course in the darkness, for he had not now the cries to guide him; and he experienced much difficulty in making way at all through the dense brushwood. The thorns tore his face and hands, the moss-covered soil gave way under his feet and all his energy was needed for him to continue scrambling in this thorny labyrinth. But he was sustained by the thought that there was near him an unfortunate being dying for want of aid, about to yield his soul to God without a priest's voice to murmur the words of comfort in his ear.

He soon felt glad that he had persevered, for in about ten minutes he distinctly heard groans near at hand. He redoubled his efforts and at last reached a clear glade in the wood where the moon penetrated through the trees.

In the dim light he saw a man stretched at the foot of a beach tree and hastened up to him. The gloomy forebodings of Jacqueline had been fulfilled. It was indeed Michel lying on the grass in a pool of blood. M. Jean recognised him by his dress and the brass badge he wore, not by his face, for he had never seen him before. The unfortunate gamekeeper had fallen on his back, and the blood was flowing from a wound in the throat. His strength was rapidly failing. When the good curé raised him in his arms and placed him against a tree he opened his eyes and tried to speak, but his voice was gone, and he could not utter a single word distinctly. He threw his arms convulsively about, raised his left hand, and seemed to point to a particular spot in the wood.

"Was the murderer there?" asked M. Jean, "or did he run off in that direction."

Michel had strength to make a sign in the affirmative. "Think of God, my son," said the priest; "of God who will pardon you as you pardon your enemies." And he began in a low voice to pronounce the absolution, that supreme consolation which the Roman Catholic church affords the dying in the terrible hour when eternity begins.

The poor gamekeeper thanked the priest by a grateful look, and seemed comforted. He breathed more freely, the convulsive trembling that had agitated his whole body ceased, the blood stopped flowing. M. Jean had a moment's hope. He bound the wound with his handkerchief, and held a bottle of smelling salts to the wounded man's nostrils, which revived him a little, and he again tried to speak.

"The man—who—shot—me," he murmured "was the—the——"

"Name him, name him," exclaimed the priest.

"It was the—the p——"

The sentence was not completed and the name of the murderer was lost in a sigh, the final one. Michel was dead, and carried with him the secret of the crime.

M. Jean laid him gently on the moss and began to pray for the soul that had taken flight. The dead man's eyes were open and his mouth, contracted, seemed still trying to pronounce the name of his murderer. His left arm

remained stretched out as if pointing to the road by which the villain had fled. But all was over for Michel. The unfortunate gamekeeper, a victim to his duty, had not the consolation before dying of naming his murderer, and his tragic end would apparently go to swell the list of unpunished crimes which had their origin in poaching.

At Charly, as in other places, the poachers, secretly protected as they were by the country people, were very rarely caught. A peasant who would like to have a thief condemned to the galleys for stealing one of his chickens is always ready to sympathise with these nocturnal sharp-shooters.

The good curé of Charly praying for the victim of this cruel assassination gave no thought to these social questions. He was wholly absorbed in his grief and his prayers. Nevertheless after invoking the pity of the Almighty, he remembered that human justice had its rights, and that it was his duty to warn the authorities as soon as possible.

The wood in which the murder had been committed was only separated by a wall from the park of M. de Brannes, and extended almost to the gate of the château which was erected on the summit of the hill. This gate opened on the high-road at the entrance to the principal street of Charly, and the murderer must either have been very bold, or felt pretty sure of escaping, to attack the gamekeeper at a distance of a couple of hundred yards from the village.

The simplest thing to do in this sad case was to summon the servants of the count, and that is what M. Jean determined to do. Rising from his knees he tried as best he might to make his way by the shortest road to the château. In a few moments he perceived a light approaching him through the trees, and at the same time he heard some people talking.

"This way, this way!" he cried as loud as he could.

A sound of hurried steps answered his cry, and an instant afterwards a footman carrying a lantern entered the glade followed by two keepers armed with double-barrelled guns. Along with these came a tall man of aristocratic appearance, whom M. Jean remembered having seen at mass on the previous Sunday. It was the Count de Brannes, and by his hurried gait it was evident that he had a presentiment of some disaster.

"Ah, sir!" cried the worthy priest, "I was just about to call your servants. A murder has been committed here—Poor Michel!—Is'n't it horrible?"

M. de Brannes advanced a step or two, and recognising the dead body, started back in dismay.

"Then I was not deceived," he said in a voice of deep emotion. "I was seated at the drawing room window when I heard the report of a gun, and somehow or other it flashed across my mind that it had been fired at Michel. Ah! the villains! they had long hated him, and now they have killed him!"

The footman and his two companions were on their knees beside the corpse, exchanging exclamations of pity for Michel, and maledictions against his murderers.

"Pardon me, your reverence," said the count, recovering himself and resuming his habitual studied politeness; "forgive my not having recognised you before. This horrible scene so troubled me that I lost my self-possession, and besides you are the last person I expected to find here——"

In these last words there was evidently a question politely concealed by an expression of astonishment, and M. Jean hastened to reply. "It was chance that brought me here," he said hurriedly; "an unfortunate chance, too, as I did not arrive in time to prevent the crime. I had stopped on the bank of the Marne when I heard a shot and then a second one, followed by a

cry of pain. I at once ran up here as quickly as I could and found the poor fellow breathing still : but I had only just time to give him absolution before he expired in my arms. ”

“ And the murderer had disappeared ? ” said M. de Brannes, bitterly ; “ doubtless he is already in safety and hopes to escape pursuit : that is what happens in this unfortunate country ; but this time I have a clue, almost a proof, and we shall see if justice is again powerless. This is the third murder by poachers within a year in this neighbourhood. It is time that these atrocities ceased, and if I have to discover the perpetrator of the crime myself, if it costs me a fortune in detectives from Paris—— ”

“ It won’t do that, Monsieur le Comte,” said one of the keepers, an old soldier. “ I will wager a quarter’s pension that the Parisian did the deed.”

“ The man that Michel caught poaching last month ? ”

“ Yes, Monsieur le Comte, and I venture to say that he is not far off.”

“ Which way did he go ? We must find that out before we set about pursuing him.”

“ Sir,” said the curé, “ when I was standing on the river’s bank, at the moment the first shot was fired, I thought I heard footsteps in the wood in the direction of the path running alongside your park wall.”

“ Very probably. It is not likely that the murderer would make for the wood on our right, the brushwood is too dense. Still less would he have gone towards the village. You are right, your reverence, he must have gone by the river path, and I will—— ”

“ But,” interrupted M. Jean, “ we can make sure of it at once. Before I entered the wood I was talking to a woman whom I had just met. I left her standing in the road, and told her to wait for me. She will certainly be able to tell us if anyone has come out of the wood, and if so, which way he went.”

“ Then don’t let us lose another moment,” said the count, in a decided voice. “ François,” he added, addressing the footman, “ do not move from this spot, and if any of the Charly people come here take care that no one touches the body or even approaches it. You, Bernard, run to the gendarmerie and tell the sergeant to bring his men. We may need them all to find this scoundrel. You, La Bretèche,” added the count to the old soldier, “ come with his reverence and me, and help us to find this woman. But make haste, all of you ; we must not give the murderer time to escape.”

They set off at once, the old soldier leading the way and separating the branches with the barrel of his gun to make a passage for his master. His comrade had already gone to seek the gendarmes, and the footman alone remained beside the dead body, armed with nothing but a lantern, and not feeling at all comfortable. They descended the bank much more rapidly than the curé had climbed it, and when they reached the road M. Jean had the satisfaction of finding that the woman was still there. She was holding her children by the hand, and was preparing to leave, but on seeing the three men she paused.

“ Have you seen him ? ” cried M. de Brannes, whilst the cunning La Bretèche so placed himself as to prevent this witness in petticoats from escaping.

“ What do you want with me ? ” asked the woman, somewhat frightened.

“ Madame,” said the curé, “ the last shot we heard fired killed the count’s gamekeeper.”

“ Good God ! Then that cry was—— ”

"The death-cry of the unfortunate man. But we have every reason to believe that the murderer made off in this direction. Did you see anything of him?"

"I saw a man suddenly appear in the wood at the corner of the wall there."

"The park wall," observed M. de Brannes. "I felt sure that he must have gone that way. No doubt he ran towards Joinville?"

"No, sir; he crossed this path and descended to the river. I think he went to hide the gun and the game he was carrying."

"Good! we'll soon find that out," exclaimed La Bretèche, turning round to run down to the Marne.

"Stop a moment," said the count, restraining him. "What did the man do after that?" he asked.

"He came back to the path and then went towards Joinville; but he was not running; on the contrary, he was walking quietly along."

"Then he can't be far off?"

"I don't think he can be."

"What was he like?" asked La Bretèche, forgetting the impoliteness of interrupting his master.

"He seemed to me tall and thin, and he wore a blouse and a large straw hat."

"That's what I thought. It was the Parisian!" cried the keeper.

"Whoever he was," said M. de Brannes, "we must find him. You say he followed the river?"

"Yes, sir," replied the woman.

"Good! It would take him more than an hour to reach Joinville, even if he walked quickly, so we may catch him yet."

"Yes, if he has not gone straight to the Charly railway station; there is a cross-road a quarter of a mile from here," muttered M. Jean.

"True. And if he has gone to Paris the trace is lost."

"There's no danger of that, Monsieur le Comte; no doubt he has his reasons for not wishing to pass the fortifications, and he has others for keeping in the neighbourhood of Charly," said the old keeper.

"Well, let us try to catch him. Perhaps, too, it would be as well to keep an eye on this woman," muttered M. de Brannes to the curé. He did not speak low enough, however, for the singer heard him.

"There's no need of that, sir," she said with bitterness; "I am poor, but I do not take the part of such a wretch as that. To prove it, I will follow you."

"She'll only hinder us," grumbled the keeper.

"Yes; but she may help us to recognise the man," said the count.

"Certainly; and I am sure she is incapable of betraying us," remarked M. Jean.

"Come on, then!" cried M. de Brannes.

They set off, followed by the curé carrying the elder of the boys in his arms, while the mother carried the other one, and proceeded at a good pace. La Bretèche, with his gun loaded and ready to fire, led the way. The road they took was the one that M. Jean had traversed an hour before. Without meeting anyone they reached the cross road that led to the station, and there they halted, as it was necessary to come to some decision. By turning to the right they could quickly reach the station. By keeping to the left they would follow the winding course of the Marne, which was here very narrow and thickly wooded on both banks.

"It seems to me," said M. de Brannes, "that if the murderer hid his gun in front of the park wall he must intend to come back for it, and he cannot therefore be far off."

"That's true," said M. Jean; "and perhaps we had better return to the spot and keep watch there."

"With all respect, your reverence," observed the keeper, "that plan will be a good one later on, but at present I think we ought not to give up pursuit. I hear singing in front of us, and I see a light. It must be some fresh-water sailors at their revels. I'll go and ask if they have seen a man in a blouse pass by."

"Let us all go," said the count. "I wish to question them myself."

After advancing a hundred paces or so they came upon one of the strangest scenes they had ever witnessed. On the grassy bank of the river a tent of striped linen stuff had been erected, through the opening of which were to be seen the preparations for a brilliant banquet, lit up by four candles and half a dozen Venetian lanterns. The knives and forks were laid on a Turkey carpet, with an abundance of glass, and several bottles of champagne. Reclining in Turkish fashion, or couched like Romans of the decline, four guests were preparing to do honour to this rustic supper, whilst a fifth was actively engaged in extracting a variety of eatables and drinkables from the depths of an immense basket.

All five were most strangely attired. Two of them were women, and wore Turkish dresses of the most fantastic pattern, whilst the men were clothed in scarlet boating-costumes and wore enormous Panama hats. The one who was unpacking the basket would have been taken by a savage chief for one of his tribe, for he was wrapped in an enormous white burrous and had his head adorned with a crown of feathers.

M. Jean, little acquainted with the manners of boating-men on the Marne, paused, astonished, and somewhat frightened at this bivouac of highly-civilised Redskins; and the Count de Brannes, not being in a joyful mood, did not care to put questions to persons from whom he could not expect to get any useful information. La Bretèche, accustomed to the ways of these boating-men, was not so much astonished, and went straight up to the tall fellow in the feathered head-dress to ask him about the poacher. Hardly had the keeper come within radius of the glow of light issuing from the tent than a clamour of noise greeted his arrival.

"A stranger! a pale-face in the wigwam of the Red Indian!" shouted a deep bass voice above the chorus of shrill female voices. "Scalp him, Brave Buffalo, and bring in his hairy locks."

"None of your nonsense, you buffoons," said La Bretèche. "I want a proper answer to my question, and have the right to demand it. I suppose you see my badge?"

Brave Buffalo now abandoned his interesting occupation and came forward probably with the intention of making some ill-timed joke, more appropriate to the savannahs of America.

"Monsieur Julien!" exclaimed the old keeper as he found himself face to face with this sham Mohican.

"What! it's you, La Bretèche," said the young savage roaring with laughter. "By Jove, this is a queer meeting. How is my uncle getting on?"

"Your uncle is here, sir," observed the Count de Brannes, suddenly appearing. "I see what a free life you are leading—how much more amusement you manage to have than when you were with me."

"Uncle, I assure you that—had I but known—I did not expect—"

stammered the unfortunate nephew, making every effort to look respectable in his leggings and burnous, and by no means succeeding in doing so.

"Oh, oh!" put in the man with the deep bass voice.

"Brave Buffalo is smoking the pipe of peace with the pale faces! Let us hide such a shameful sight from the tribe of Red Indians."

The tent hangings were suddenly drawn aside by an active hand, and as speedily fell, but not without allowing M. Jean to catch a sight of the preparations for the grand party.

"I can quite understand that you get more amusement out of such associates than you used to do at the château," continued M. de Brannes, "but you might as well take your diversion at a greater distance from Chasseneuil."

"I declare, my uncle, that it is quite by chance that——"

"That I find you disguised as a Carribee Indian, I don't doubt it. I suppose it was quite by chance that you exchanged your lawyer's gown for this tinsel, and carry on all this nonsense?"

"It's all my friends' doing," said Julien excitedly. "I give you my word of honour, I did not even know those women this morning, and shall have forgotten all about them by this evening."

The count could not help smiling at the vehemence with which this protestation was uttered. Perhaps he half guessed why his nephew was so anxious to justify a levity which was quite pardonable in a young lawyer of five-and-twenty. The opportunity was not a good one for moralising, and M. de Brannes soon returned to a much more serious subject.

"We will dismiss the matter now, Julien," he said, lowering his voice. "A dreadful thing has happened; some one has just shot my poor keeper, Michel, dead."

"Good God!" exclaimed the young man, "what an awful thing! But where, and when, and who?"

"About five hundred steps from here, in the little Bélière wood, bordering the park, and I have strong reasons for believing the murderer to be a poacher well known in the neighbourhood. We are on his track. We think he must have escaped down the towing path, and when I caught sight of your lights, I sent on La Bretèche to ask if you had seen a man in a blouse pass this way."

"Tall, thin, in a blue blouse, and a broad-brimmed straw hat?"

"That's the exact description. You must have seen him then? Was it long ago? In which direction was he going?"

Julien took his uncle's arm and said in a low voice, as he pointed to the river, "He is just over there."

"What?"

"Yes. Just now a man, dressed exactly as I say, came and offered to sell us a pheasant."

"Which he had killed in my woods, before murdering my keeper, the wretch!"

"I had an idea the pheasant was not honestly come by, and I declined to purchase it. Then the man suggested he should catch us some crayfish in the Marne, and we agreed with him to do so. There he is in our boat."

"Then we are sure of the scoundrel," muttered La Bretèche between his teeth.

"This almost excuses your boating expedition," continued the count, "and I forgive you, but we must not let the villain escape us; you go and call him; La Bretèche shall immediately seize him, and I hope your five

friends who are drinking in there will, if necessary, lend us a helping hand."

"Certainly, my dear uncle; I myself have pretty strong wrists, and could undertake to tackle him single-handed, but——"

"But what? Are you going to plead for him?"

"By no means, uncle, only this man's impudence seems something startling. Setting to work to catch crayfish, within a few feet of the place where you have just committed a murder, is not exactly a likely proceeding. You must agree with me there."

"It certainly is a most cool proceeding. But we'll leave all such arguments to the counsel who defends him at the assizes, and meanwhile——"

"Silence, here he is," whispered Julien.

In fact, a man was seen slowly climbing up the bank, net in hand, and, thanks to the full moon, his figure and dress could be plainly identified.

"That's the man—that's the murderer," said the street singer, in a stifled voice.

"This way, my friend," called M. de Brannes's nephew, "here are some more claimants for your crayfish."

"I'm coming, sir; I have had rare good luck, for I have got three dozen. They give me three francs a piece for them at the Café Anglais." While saying this he doffed his hat to the new arrivals.

"Robert!" shrieked the poor woman, drawing back in surprise and terror.

At this scream of horror, and at the name which he never dreamt of hearing at such a time or place, the man sprang forward, and before La Bretèche could prevent him, he seized the singer by the arm, and pulled her towards him to look at her more closely.

"Eugénie!" he exclaimed, pushing her away from him indignantly. Then throwing away his nets, he was about to take flight; but La Bretèche was beforehand with him, seized him by the collar, and made him prisoner on the spot.

The old guard, however, was not strong enough to hold so young and strong a fellow as the poacher, who struggled with all his strength, and would probably have effected his escape without the opportune intervention of Brave Buffalo. Nephew Julien justified his title to the name by wrestling bravely with the refractory prisoner, who was not unlikely to be armed, and inclined to repay a meddler in other folks' affairs by a stab.

Happily, the man, who had still plenty of strength in him, felt that he would be ultimately overpowered, and suddenly desisted in his attempt at escape, saying, "It's not worth while to strangle me, and prevent my escaping from you. Leave go! Deuce take you! I won't make off."

They then let go, but gathered closely round him—La Bretèche standing on one side of him and Julien on the other.

"O Robert, it's you!" repeated the horrified singer.

"Yes, certainly it's me!" said the poacher sharply. "I never thought we should meet here, nor you either, as far as I can understand."

"Ah!" exclaimed the unhappy mother, "it was necessary, then, for a crime to be committed to bring us face to face."

"What crime? I have done nothing," muttered Robert, shrugging his shoulders: "and I should like to know what I am wanted here for."

The group at this moment collected on the banks of the Marne would have formed an interesting study for a theatrical manager. The prisoner was fuming like a wolf caught in a trap while the pseudo savage was

threatening him with his fists, and the keeper held him within reach of his gun-stock. The count and M. Jean were grouped round the singer, who could hardly stand; one terrified child was hiding behind its mother's skirts, and the other behind the priest's cassock. To complete the picture, the male and female members of the boating party of Red Indians, attracted from their tent by the noise of the conflict, made up a picturesque background.

"Yes, I wish to know what you want with me?" demanded the poacher a second time.

"It's I who ought to put questions, and not you," said M. de Brannes, coolly. "What were you doing just now in the Bélière woods, close to my park?"

"Ha! ha!" observed Robert with the coolest insolence. "It seems that I have the honour of conversing with the lord and master of the Chasseneuil château."

"What has that to do with my question, you rascal?"

"Oh, no abuse, please! You mean that I occasionally venture to hunt down some of your game? Ah, well! it's quite likely. I have particular opinions on the subject. Besides, it's not much use my denying it, as I have already been caught by one of your keepers."

"He owns it, the scoundrel, and that's what he has taken his revenge for," exclaimed La Bretèche.

"I own nothing at all, you old dappled-grey campaigner, except that I have shot over the grounds of his honour, and forgot to ask his permission, which he would have been certain to refuse."

"Quite correct," said M. de Brannes; "you are also ready to own, I suppose, that you had just killed a pheasant there."

This time Robert made no reply.

"You just proposed to us that we should buy it," said M. Julien. "All these gentlemen are prepared to swear to it if need be."

"And these ladies, too, I suppose? In the face of such respectable witnesses I can raise no objections. Certainly I have killed a pheasant; what next?"

"And you have hidden it, as well as your gun, on the bank, near the water's edge. Don't deny it. That woman saw you."

"She!" shouted Robert, looking at the singer, with eyes sparkling with anger. "Ah! it was she who denounced me! It's worth while knowing that!"

"You are mistaken," said M. Jean. "It was quite by chance, and, furthermore, your wife had not recognised you, as you are well aware."

"His wife!" repeated M. de Brannes, amazed.

"Yes, sir," whispered the curé; "at the time the shots were heard I was talking on the river bank to this poor creature, who was telling me all her misfortunes, and of her husband's disappearance, which had left her entirely to her own resources. She has discovered him again, and under what sad circumstances, good heavens!"

"In fact they have mutually recognised each other," murmured the count. "I pity this unhappy woman, but I think it will be wise not to lose sight of her. In such a serious business it is as well to mistrust everybody; besides, her evidence is most important."

"I don't think she has the least wish to escape," replied M. Jean, in a low tone; "she would rather follow him to prison if she could, for she still loves him."

The sense of these side remarks was speedily caught by the poacher, who scornfully observed: "Yes, gentlemen, it was certainly my wife who was at hand to cause me to be arrested. The meeting was a most providential one, was it not? But, if I am not mistaken, sir, you did not leave your château to discuss my domestic affairs with me, and I shall be much obliged by your acquainting me with what you have to say."

"Really, this is going too far," said M. de Brannes, confounded less by the man's impudence than by his choice of language.

"What is going too far?" answered the poacher. "I am caught in the act of poaching, or very nearly so, and know what is in store for me: a fine, which I laugh at for good reasons, and imprisonment, which may be for a long term perhaps, as it is my second offence. Your keeper has only to draw up a report, and I'll not prevent your fetching the gendarmes; but there is no need any longer to disturb this respectable company, bent on their own amusement." When adding this parting thrust he pointed to the boating men who stood near him, and then resumed: "Just ask your nephew for his opinion."

A low groan from the strolling singer followed this impertinent onslaught. The wretched Eugénie felt ready to faint, and perhaps, if one had known what was uppermost in her mind, one would have recognised that she was less troubled by her husband's terrible position than by his disdainful indifference towards her, she who had always adored him. The good curé took compassion on her, and drew her gently a little way from the assembled group.

"It is not simply a question of poaching," said M. de Brannes, looking the poacher steadily in the face.

"Pooh! of what else, then? Does it happen to be something connected with my wife's wrongs, which your nephew there proposes to plead as a pretext for a judicial separation? I believe the gentleman is a barrister, if I have heard rightly?"

"This jesting is very much out of place; and you are doing yourself more harm than good," whispered M. Julien in the ear of the accused.

Brave Buffalo had again assumed his personality as a young man of fashion and a newly-fledged lawyer. The count, irritated by the poacher's audacity, was ready to stigmatize him as a murderer to his face, but he reflected that it would be better to have him securely handcuffed before reproaching him with his crime, and he answered coldly:

"You are acquainted with Michel, are you not?"

"Who is Michel?" answered the man, without the least agitation.

"My keeper."

"That's not particularly clear, since you have three or four. However, I suppose you mean the Alsatian fellow, who served in the Zouaves?"

"Exactly so. You don't deny having had certain relations with him?"

"Not in the least: I have good reasons for remembering him, and not too pleasant reasons either. He once caught me laying snares in your preserves at Apilly, and was the cause of my undergoing three weeks' imprisonment. I shall pay him out for it some day."

This was spoken so glibly, and in such a natural tone of voice, that M. de Brannes was quite dumbfounded.

"So you confess that you are irritated with Michel?" he asked, after a short pause.

"I confess I am," said the poacher calmly, "as I equally confess that I have killed one of your pheasants."

"Then you will please to follow me at once."

"Stop a bit! It seems you constitute yourself a self-made policeman! Rather a peculiar thing for a gentleman to do! Where do you want to take me?"

"To the place where you first hid your gun, and then——"

"All right; don't bother yourself any more, sir; I am willing to be done to death, were it only to please my wife, who has given you so much useful information," replied Robert, glancing towards the singer.

"La Bretèche! keep an eye on that man on the way," ordered M. de Brannes.

"Julien, you will not leave us, I suppose? I am sorry to take you from your male and female friends, but you may be of use to us in more ways than one, and ——"

"I am at your service, uncle; and as to my lady friends, I assure you——"

"All right! you shall explain everything at the château, when you have changed your dress, which we'll take for granted. Just now all that is necessary is for you to accompany us, in order to lend us a hand in case the man offers resistance."

"Resistance! I resist! What for? I have just told you I will go, and my word holds good," said the poacher, quite coolly. "Only, these boating gentlemen ought to pay me for my crayfish. I won't mention the pheasant, as it is to be confiscated, but as regards my three dozen crayfish, hissing in the net over there, I have a perfect right to a five-franc piece for them. That won't be too much to buy tobacco with while in prison."

"They'll give you plenty of tobacco, you ruffian," growled La Bretèche between his teeth.

The count with a severe glance imposed silence on the keeper; then, turning towards the priest, said:

"Come, your reverence, will you be good enough to take care of this poor young woman? And," he added in a lower tone, pointing to the poacher, "would anyone have believed that there was such an impudent wretch?"

"If he is guilty," muttered nephew Julien, "he is the greatest actor of the day."

"If you don't object, gentlemen," said the poacher coolly, "as nobody seems willing to buy my crayfish, I will present them to the corporal of gendarmes. I am probably fated to cultivate his acquaintance pretty often, and small presents conduce to friendship." And the fellow, having picked up and shouldered the net containing his fish, walked forward, chin in air, and his hands in his pockets.

La Bretèche never moved a foot's-breadth from him, and he was soon joined by Julien, who had only taken sufficient time to request his boating friends to wait there till his return. The curé and M. de Brannes followed, with the two children and their unhappy mother.

Good M. Jean began to lose his head among all these singular events. A horrible murder, which he had almost witnessed; a dramatic meeting between an unhappy woman and a wicked husband, whom he had brought together involuntarily; so much had not happened to him, during the thirty years he had spent at his peaceful cure in the Versailles diocese, not to mention the disagreeable prospect of being mixed up in a case of terrible gravity, and the necessity of contributing such incriminating evidence as must tend to the conviction of the accused, for he, the minister of a God of peace, would be the instrument of sending a fellow-creature to the

scaffold. This idea upset him to such a degree, that he half regretted not having gone quietly on his way, instead of running in the direction of the gun-shot he had heard. As to Brave Buffalo, otherwise Julien de la Chanterie, his fears and doubts ran in another direction. He regretted having been caught by his uncle in such wild company, and he especially feared his relating the story of the tribe of Indians to his daughter, Mademoiselle Gabrielle de Brannes, who had just left the convent where she had been educated, and was at this very moment at the Château de Chasseneuil.

The count with difficulty controlled himself, for he was deeply attached to the unfortunate man Michel. La Bretèche made great efforts not to avenge his comrade by blowing out the murderer's brains. The singer prayed in a low voice that she might die, and gazed sadly at the river, in whose depths she might find an end to her misery : the children wept.

Of all those concerned, in various ways, with the lamentable business, perhaps the poacher Robert, "the Parisian," as the people of Charly called him, was the least concerned. He went along with a blithe step, whistling Nadaud's air, "The two Gendarmes." You would have taken him for a boatman come ashore on his way down the Marne. He never uttered a word, however, and, until they had passed M. de Brannes's park, the journey was accomplished in perfect silence. There, the old keeper, who kept close to his prisoner, seized him somewhat brutally by the elbow, saying : "Halt ! here we are at the corner of the wood, the gun must be hidden not far from here." And turning towards the singer, he said roughly to her : "Come ! you woman, show us the hiding-place, as you were there, where he fired the shot."

"I saw nothing, and shall show you nothing," said the poor woman excitedly.

La Bretèche was going to burst out, but the count readily recognised that it would be too cruel to force the unhappy woman to help people acting against her husband. "It is unnecessary ! the hiding place cannot be hard to find ; we shall hunt for it," he said, making a sign to M. Jean, who thanked him with a warm-hearted glance.

"Don't give yourselves the trouble to hunt," said the poacher, "it is in that hollow willow over yonder ; you see I don't take any pleasure in tormenting you, but you are under no obligations to me, for if I shorten your trouble it is simply because I want to get out of my wife's sight as soon as I can, and I hope she will not follow me to prison——"

"Shut up. It's cowardly to talk like that," said Julien de la Chanterie, in a tone which seemed to produce some impression on Robert, for, instead of continuing, he now contented himself with shrugging his shoulders.

"Monsieur le Comte, here are the gendarmes coming," exclaimed La Bretèche.

In fact, muskets were seen gleaming through the neighbouring thicket, and the clatter of side arms was heard. It was the sergeant who now appeared on the scene with two of his men. On seeing the assembled group waiting for them on the road they hastened up. "Ah ! Monsieur le Comte, what a business !" said the sergeant, raising his three-cornered hat ; "I should never have thought that these rogues would have the cheek to kill a man at less than five hundred yards from the barracks. But, this time, we will catch the fellow who fired the shot or I'll lose my stripes. I have already some evidence, and we will track him out——"

"You needn't give yourself the trouble, sergeant, we hold him," interrupted La Bretèche. "It is the individual you see there."

"No, really ! but yes—it's he ! it's the Parisian ! Ah ! I recognise the rascal perfectly ! I have had a description of his person in my mind for a long time past."

"So have I you ; I recognise you well, sergeant," said the singer's husband, scoffingly ; "the last time we met, you did me the honour of arresting me. A fellow doesn't forget that sort of thing readily."

"All right ! All right ! we shall see if you will continue joking by-and-by. Come ! you fellows, clap the handcuffs on him."

The gendarmes hastened to obey, and as the poacher offered no resistance the operation was soon accomplished. "Ah ! ah !" said Robert with a fine sneer, "last time you did not put them on me. Have the regulations changed ?"

"Last time the case was one of poaching rabbits, but this time the application of clause 302 of the Penal Code is in question, my fine fellow," replied the sergeant, almost merrily, for the ease with which this important capture had been effected delighted him.

"Excuse me, sergeant," answered Robert, "but as I never studied law, as you may well imagine, may I be allowed to ask what this wonderful clause 302 refers to ?"

"It merely refers to the penalty of death ; but there are other clauses in the same Code dealing with wilful murder afore-planned."

"Good ! I understand now, I had premeditated killing a pheasant, and I certainly watched for it under the tree on which it was perched."

"Enough nonsense," said the sergeant reprovingly. "Your case is already bad enough, and when a fellow has just murdered a man he ought not to indulge in jesting."

"What ! I have murdered a man !" exclaimed Robert, abruptly regaining his gravity.

"You're surely not going to pretend that this is the first news you have of it ? Not an hour ago, in the woods of La Bêlière, you killed Michel, the keeper of the Count de Brannes here present."

"Michel ? the old soldier who summoned me ?"

"Yes, Michel whom you had a grudge against since that affair. Your pretended astonishment is of no earthly use. That style of thing does not go down with me."

The count was quite amazed at the audacity of this fellow, who persisted in affecting innocence, when there was so much circumstantial evidence against him. His nephew Julien was struck by the sudden change of expression which came over the poacher's face. His features contracted, and he half closed his eyes, as if he wished to collect his thoughts. Was it the effect of surprise and indignation at an unjust charge, or rather a sign of emotion at seeing himself unmasked, something like the feelings a soldier experiences on finding his retreat from the battle-field cut off ? At all events, Robert soon recovered his self-possession. "I had a grudge against him, that's quite possible," he said raising his head, "but it was not I who killed him, for I had not met him for more than a month, and I didn't even know that——"

"You can tell all that to the investigating magistrate," interrupted the sergeant.

"Do you think that if I were guilty I should have amused myself by strolling beside the Marne, instead of making off to Paris ?"

"That's a bit of special pleading all ready for your counsel, but we have

not yet reached the Assize Court, my fine fellow, and as I have you in custody I must now begin my enquiry."

"To begin with," said M. de Brannes, "I ought to tell you that we found him fishing for cray-fish, which he offered for sale to my nephew here."

The sergeant looked at Julien with a certain amount of astonishment. The burnous and feather head-dress upset all his ideas as to the manners of the upper circles of society, to which Count de Brannes's nephew undoubtedly belonged. "He offered them to my nephew and his friends, who were boating down here," continued the master of Chasseneuil.

"Good! I understand now," said the sergeant with a knowing look.

"I must add that the man made no difficulty about admitting that he had just killed a pheasant, and had hidden his game and gun in the hollow of that willow tree."

"The gun! Monsieur le Comte, oh! that's perfect, and with such a piece of evidence I should be a mere novice if I did not bring everything to light. Piédouche," said the sergeant to one of his gendarmes, "go and search the hiding-place, and bring everything you find in it."

The sound of a sob made him turn his head and he saw the singer, whom he had not previously remarked in the haste of his first inquiries. "Who is that person?" he asked with a frown.

"She's that wretched man's wife," replied M. Jean in a low tone.

"Really, your reverence, I didn't see you either, ah! she's his wife is she! Deuce take me if I thought such a ruffian could be a married man."

To M. Jean's great satisfaction the sergeant's remarks were interrupted by the return of his subordinate, who re-appeared on the bank, triumphantly carrying at arm's length a pheasant and the weapon with which it had been killed. The poacher did not stir, and M. Julien who was watching him, did not see the least sign of emotion on his face.

"Hand the gun to me," said the sergeant; "I know all about that kind of article." And he at once took possession of the weapon, which was a vile double-barrelled firearm, part of the barrels of which, once very long, had been sawn off, no doubt so that the poacher might at need hide the gun under his blouse. The intelligent non-commissioned officer of the gendarmes, examined this wretched weapon in a hasty and apparently a somewhat careless manner. "Now my fine fellow," he continued; "just give me some particulars as to what you did in the Bélière wood; it ought not to embarrass you to do so as you admit that you went for a stroll there at dusk."

"It's a simple matter," coldly said the prisoner, who had given up joking, since he knew the gravity of the charge against him. "I had already been caught once in the underwood at Apilly, and I knew that the keepers were always on the look out in that direction. So I was not such a fool as to go there; but as I had noticed that the pheasants in Chasseneuil park came every evening to feed at the edge of the Bélière woods, I thought to myself that no one would be on the watch so close to the château. I had my gun hidden close at hand, so I went off strolling along the riverside; and on my way I even set some pots for cray-fish over there, just where those boating gentlemen came ashore."

"What o'clock was it when you entered the wood?"

"My watch found its way to the pawnshop a good while ago. All I know is, it had been dark for the last twenty minutes at the least."

"Good! And you went to work almost at once?"

"I knew a good spot and went straight to it."

‘And whereabouts was your good spot?’

‘Over yonder, a little to the right; there are two or three oak-standers with low branches, which look as if they had grown on purpose, for pheasants to perch on.’

‘Then you indulged in a perfect massacre, eh?’

‘Why, no! I killed the bird your gendarme is holding by the legs; it’s a fine young cock, which I should have got fully four francs for. That sufficed me for my evening, the more so as I felt afraid that the people at the château would hurry up on hearing the report. So I picked up the bird, started off as fast as I could, and hang it! there’s no need to tell you the rest; you know it as well as I do, as I was collared half-an-hour afterwards.’

All this was said deliberately, clearly, without hesitation, or needless words, and the brief narrative made a favourable impression on M. Jean, M. Julien, and even on the Count de Brannes. ‘And so you only hit one bird?’ said the sergeant absently; he was seemingly absorbed in deep meditation.

‘Naturally, as I merely fired at one.’

‘Then how do you account for the fact that both barrels of your gun were discharged?’ This question was asked *ex-abrupto* in a clear incisive voice. Evidently, the sergeant, past-master in legal fencing, had kept this unexpected thrust for the finish. ‘Just look, gentlemen,’ he added showing his two fingers, which he had stuffed down the barrels of the gun, and which he now displayed begrimed with powder.

The poacher, visibly disturbed, took his time to answer. However, he soon recovered his possession, and said, without displaying much emotion, ‘I fired both shots at the same time. I never miss doing that when I go poaching at night. To hit a pheasant perched on a tree, when you fire the lead in both barrels isn’t at all too much.’

A murmur of incredulity greeted this statement, and Julien de la Chanterie said in a low voice to M. Jean: ‘I was half inclined to think he was innocent, but I begin to fear that we have a cunning rascal to deal with.’

‘Well, his reverence here was on the outskirts of the wood, and heard everything,’ said M. de Brannes.

‘I heard two distinct reports,’ murmured M. Jean.

‘Two reports; not three?’ asked the sergeant.

‘Two only, and there was some interval between them. Between the first and second a full minute, or a minute and a half, must have elapsed.’

‘And they both came from the same direction?’

‘Nearly so. The last, however, seemed rather farther from me.’

‘But the sound still came from the summit of the slope, and a little to the right?’

‘Yes, I am certain of it,’ said the good priest, half regretfully, for he fully understood the consequences of his declaration.

‘That’s not quite exact,’ exclaimed the poacher, ‘I killed the pheasant almost half way up the slope, and I was going off in the direction of the park wall when I heard a shot much nearer the high road to Charly. You can quite understand that I did not go back to see what it was.’

‘Good! but that would make three reports, and his reverence only heard two.’

‘Because he mistook the two discharges of my gun for a single one. Ask any sportsman you like if the sharpest person can’t sometimes be mistaken in this respect.’

This fresh attempt at justification did not seem of any more weight than the first ones, and M. Julien, who never missed opening the season on his uncle's estate, slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"I ought in justice to own," said M. Jean, "that the first report made much more noise than the second one."

"Because the gun was fired much nearer to you," retorted the sergeant.

"I will add," continued the priest, "that during the interval between the two reports, I fancied I heard some one walking through the wood, in the direction of the park wall."

"That was I—so you see," exclaimed Robert.

"I'm not quite sure about all that, my lad," replied the cautious sergeant, "and I am going to give my idea as to how things happened. It's simple enough as you said just now. You had just killed your pheasant, and were going to pick it up, when Michel, who was watching you, made his appearance and surprised you. Then you fired your second shot at him at close range."

"It's not true. I killed nobody and saw nobody."

"I understand, my lad; you and all the rest of them go on the same tack, and sometimes jurymen are taken in by it. As a proof of what I say, remember the rascal who murdered a keeper in the Ferrière woods last winter, and who obtained the admission of extenuating circumstances; however, this time, I greatly hope——"

"Sergeant, I implore you," murmured the worthy priest, pointing towards the poor woman, who at this moment stood a few paces off, suffering frightful tortures.

"Don't be alarmed, your reverence. I'll shew due regard for her," said the sergeant in a low voice, "and if she's really the scoundrel's wife, I think I can let her off from attending at the confrontation with the dead body."

"What? a confrontation?"

"Yes, Michel's body is still up there with two of my men watching over it, and it is absolutely necessary that the ruffian who killed him should be present at the inquiry I shall hold on the spot; but you see women are rather superfluous on those occasions on account of their nerves."

"It seems to me useless to take her with us," said M. de Brannes, "however, if her evidence is very important——"

"Her evidence?" replied the sergeant, who was ignorant of the part that the strolling singer had taken, sorely against her will, in the poacher's arrest.

"Yes," answered the count. "She was with her children on the high road; she saw the man leave the wood, and it was she who pointed out to us the direction he had taken."

"The deuce she did! that makes it a different matter, and I can't take upon myself to let her off like that; the more especially as with her guitar on her back she looks as if she sang at suburban fêtes, and virtuosos of that kind never have any fixed abode. If I let her go I should not perhaps be able to find her again."

"That's true, but there is a way out of the difficulty. I will have her taken to the château, where she and her children will be cared for, until the examining magistrate, entrusted with the enquiry, comes to a decision concerning her."

"Oh! that would do very well indeed," exclaimed the sergeant.

"And I," said M. Jean, "I thank you Monsieur le Comte, on behalf of this unhappy woman who is really worthy of pity."

These remarks were rapidly exchanged out of the hearing of everyone present, that is excepting M. Julien, who now approached the priest and whispered in his ear: "I can't help taking an interest in that poor woman—and may I confess it?—in her miserable husband as well. This man is probably guilty, and yet there is something inexplicable in his tone and bearing. I shall feel tempted to follow the matter up like a problem."

"Alas! I greatly fear that the solution will be a fatal one," muttered M. Jean. "I was present at the victim's death, and——"

"Gentlemen," said the sergeant, in what he called his official tone of voice, "I must request you to follow me for I have to continue the enquiry. As for you," he added, turning towards the strolling singer, "you will be summoned as a witness to-morrow, and to-night Monsieur de Brannes will allow you to sleep at the Château of Chassenuil. His keeper will take you there."

"I shall not leave my husband," said the woman excitedly.

"You must, however. Don't alarm yourself, you will soon see him again; but, just now, we have no time to lose in explanations. So——"

"La Bretèche!" called M. de Brannes, "you are to accompany this person; go round by the park railing and tell my majordomo that I wish to have her lodged in the vacant room above the stables."

"Accept his kindness," said M. Jean gently to the poor woman, who was weeping bitterly as she looked at Robert, "Accept it if only for the sake of your poor children——"

"And abandon him when I already have to reproach myself with causing his ruin!"

"The case isn't hopeless yet, and I promise you I will do all I can to have him leniently treated."

"And I," said Julien de la Chanterie, "I will do my best to help him to prove his innocence."

The singer expressed her thanks with a heartfelt look, and taking her two children by the hand, she followed La Bretèche, without having the courage to turn round and wish Robert good-bye. It was with tearless eyes that he watched her leave. "Come, gentlemen," continued the sergeant, "we must make haste if you please. In affairs of this kind, rapidity is everything, if the inquiry is to be satisfactory. A shower of rain, or a storm of wind, obliterate the traces of feet, or wash away gun-wads, in no time, and I am most anxious not to lose anything."

"I understand," said Robert ironically, "You fancy my conviction will give you a rise in rank, perhaps make you a quarter-master. A good idea, and in your place I should do the same. Only I warn you that I mean to defend myself."

"You have a perfect right to do so."

"Well to begin with, take me to the spot where I killed the pheasant, near the three oak saplings, half way up the slope to the right. Perhaps we shall still find a few feathers there; that would delight you, as you don't want to lose anything."

"Hallo! Are you in command here? One would think I had to take my orders from an individual like you."

"What he asks for seems reasonable," said M. de Brannes, softly.

"All right!" answered the sergeant, rather vexed at the count's remark; "you will be taken there, prisoner; but even when you *have* proved to me that you killed the pheasant perched on an oak tree, you won't have done much good for yourself. I don't contradict you in that respect, and I don't at all see what you will gain by showing me a lot of feathers."

"Excuse me, but if I show them to you at some distance from the spot where the keeper fell, that will go towards proving that I was not surprised at the moment I shot the bird, and consequently that I had no motive for killing him."

"The rogue has arguments at hand, which would do honour to an old quibbler," said La Chanterie in a low voice. "He's decidedly smart."

"It would be better for him to be innocent," murmured the priest sadly.

"As for your motive," resumed the sergeant, pettishly, "just remember your grudge against Michel, who caught you out poaching last month. At all events everything will be duly authenticated, you may be sure of that. I know what it is to draw up a report. Now, gentlemen: Piédouche, run forward, tell Dr. Minard that we are coming, and return with a lantern, so that in verifying the prisoner's allegations we may be able to see distinctly."

"You brought a doctor here then?" asked M. de Brannes.

"Certainly, Monsieur le Comte, in these sort of cases, it is an elementary precaution."

When the worthy sergeant made use of such choice expressions, it was always an indication that he considered his dignity slighted.

"You were more cautious than I was," said the count, as a sop to the gendarme's wounded pride.

"And we were lucky, for Dr. Minard hasn't his equal for performing a *post-mortem* examination. Before settling at Charly, he did five years forensic practice as an expert attached to the courts of justice. But we are losing time here. Move forward, prisoner, and as you make so certain about the business, first show us your clump of trees."

"That's just what I want to do," grumbled Robert.

"You will recognise them again?"

"I could find them with my eyes shut?"

"All right! we are going to them, but no nonsense on the way, mind. If you try to give us the slip, you will only get a bullet through you."

"You can be easy on that score, I shan't put your gendarmes to the trouble of firing at me. Besides, how do you expect me to try and run off, handcuffed as I am."

Thereupon the poacher walked on across the wood, between two men in uniform, who kept particularly close to him.

"Are you coming with us, Julien?" said the count to his nephew, who seemed to hesitate about following the party.

"Well, uncle," stammered young La Chanterie, "I am really dressed—"

"In a highly improper style, no doubt; and you richly deserve to be condemned to appear in it before your cousin."

"Uncle, I implore you—"

"Don't alarm yourself. I will allow you to go and dress decently before you show yourself at the château. But I want you to be present at the inquiry, for I attach great importance to the conviction of the murderer, and you may assist in proving his guilt."

"And I, sir," said M. Jean softly, "beg of you to come with us; you may perhaps be able to establish the innocence of this wretched man, whom I cannot help pitying."

Julien, clasped the good priest's hand in silence, and they both joined the procession.

The poacher, Robert, who for the moment guided the march, advanced into the wood like a man confident in the accuracy of his assertions, and speedily reached the foot of the three tall trees he had referred to. The

sergeant there met his subaltern, Piédouche, who was returning, provided with a lantern, to announce that the doctor had almost completed his preliminary examination.

"This is where I stood when I fired," said Robert, without the least hesitation; "the pheasant was perched up there on that main branch, and it fell here—look! I told you so, here are some feathers."

And indeed when the gendarme stooped down with his lantern, he picked up three or four golden-hued feathers, which had evidently fallen from the tail of the young cock pheasant that his comrade still carried.

"Feathers signify nothing, as you know very well," exclaimed the sergeant.

"Perhaps not, but look around you a bit, my charge was rammed down with felt wads, cut with a punch. If you find four, or only three, that will prove, I suppose, that I fired both my shots on this spot."

"Oh! you can put more than two wads in one barrel. That's been done before."

"Here is one anyhow," said the gendarme, throwing a light from his lantern upon the ground. And he exhibited a small round blackened fragment, which he had just picked up at the foot of the tree. On one point, at any rate, Robert had spoken the truth, still this was a point of but little importance.

"That may be of use to us," said the sergeant, "but you will understand, my fine fellow, that we can't search here all night for needles in a hay-rick. We are wanted over yonder. We will return here to-morrow if the investigating magistrate judges it necessary."

"Really! And what about the rain which will efface everything, and the wind which blows all traces away, as you yourself said just now."

"That'll do! it is magnificent weather, and if necessary I will set a man on duty here. Is there anything else you want to show me here?"

"The ground is too dry for me to see my footprints, but I could certainly find in the brush plenty of broken branches, which would prove that I made off with the pheasant in the direction of the park."

"The brush won't be burnt down between now and to-morrow. At present we have to go and see Dr. Minard, who must be getting impatient."

The poacher shrugged his shoulders, but did not insist, and the party again set off.

"This man's guilt no longer seems so certain to me," muttered M. Julien.

"Please God, you may be right!" said M. Jean, shaking his head doubtfully.

From the spot where the pheasant had been killed, to that where the unfortunate man Michel had fallen, there was merely a distance of thirty paces, but it was necessary to climb a somewhat steep incline. When the prisoner and his escort reached the glade, where the corpse lay, the doctor had just concluded his painful task. M. Minard, a young man of good appearance, stepped with a polite air towards M. de Brannes, and bowed to him with all the deference due to the richest landowner of Charly.

"Well, Dr. Minard?" asked the count.

"Well, Monsieur le Comte, your keeper must have died almost instantaneously. As far as I can ascertain by my examination here, he was struck at close range by a charge of shot which "balled," and inflicted dreadful injuries, the left clavicle broken, the subclavian artery severed, the œsophagus torn——"

"You are sure doctor that it was a charge of shot?" asked the sergeant.

"I am certain of it. Besides the necropsy will go to prove it."

"And it will be known for certain whether the shot found in the pheasant is of the same number as that found in Michel's body."

M. Jean and Julien de la Chanterie looked at Robert, who appeared perfectly calm. There remained one decisive test, the most terrible ordeal to a guilty conscience. The sergeant took the prisoner by the arm, led him up to the dead body, extended on its back, already stiffened by death, and with its ghastly face lighted up by the lantern held by a servant in attendance. "Do you recognise him?" asked the non-commissioned officer.

Robert grew pale, but he answered in a steady voice, "How can I do otherwise, since he caught me barely more than a month ago? But I am as innocent of his death as you yourself are."

"A real murderer would be profuse in his protestations," muttered Julien. "When people express themselves in that simple manner, it's because they have an easy conscience."

"You must prove that to the jury," now answered the sergeant. "Meanwhile, prisoner, I must lock you up in the barracks; you will probably be questioned there by the investigating magistrate to-morrow, and transferred to Paris during the day."

"Where can the *post-mortem* take place?" asked the doctor, who was in no wise sorry of an opportunity to display his science and skill in judicial matters.

"We have a suitable room above the mayor's office, and I am going to have the corpse conveyed there. Piédouche, first send all those people about their business," added the sergeant, pointing at a group of inquisitive folks from Charly.

"We had better retire, there is nothing more for us to do here," said M. de Brannes, whom the sight of the dead body affected painfully. "Julien, I won't detain you any longer; however, I rely on you breakfasting with us to-morrow at Chasseneuil." And he added in an undertone: "Do you still doubt that scamp's guilt?"

"More than ever, uncle, I hope to prove to you——"

"Sergeant," at this moment said a gendarme, who had remained as sentry near the body. "I just now found this on the ground beside poor Michel," so saying, he produced a felt wad, exactly like the one which had already been found near the oak saplings.

"The two make a pair," said the sergeant. "Bring the prisoner away. I fancy that his case is clear by now."

"And I," muttered Julien in discouragement. "I really must be an utter fool, with my mania for exculpating criminals."

III.

WHILST the worthy priest of Charly took part, much against his will, in the proceedings connected with this tragical affair, his gossiping parishioner, Jacqueline Ledoux, also unwittingly experienced the influence of fate. Since the accident on the Place de la Bastille, she had not altogether regained her self-possession. Hitherto, as a rule, her thoughts had been mainly occupied in calculating the price her vegetables were likely to fetch at market, or what regulations the mayor of Charly would issue respecting the closing of wine shops.

This last matter only troubled her inasmuch as it affected the conduct of her husband, who was very partial to the potations retailed at the Café du Grand Vainqueur, the best patronised house in the whole locality. But the anonymous letter which had arrived very early that morning had greatly disturbed the good woman. Then she had experienced a deal of deception on seeing what a weak little beggar the officials at the Foundling Hospital had handed over to her in lieu of the strong, healthy child whom she had hoped to take back to Charly. Moreover, as if to cap her misfortunes, the child's fall under the hoofs of M. Wassmann's horses had made her very blood curdle, as she expressed it in terms more forcible than elegant. The consoling good-fellowship of kind-hearted Antoine Cormier, the lucky meeting with M. Jean and his cordial language, failed to serve as compensation for her misfortunes and scares. Thus she was still very much disturbed in mind when she left the railway station and curtsied to the priest who did not take the same road to the village as herself.

Charly is composed of a long endless street, with houses on both sides, running in a straight line in a hollow between wooded slopes. To the left, as you come from Paris, these slopes are covered with dense woods, in fact by an actual forest of many thousand acres, which stretches away into the department of Seine-and-Marne. To the right hand, the slopes rise but a short height above the Marne, and they are dotted over with plantations, standing amid patches of meadow-land.

At Charly almost all the houses on the left hand side of the road are occupied by petty townspeople and shopkeepers; while on the right hand, villas and châteaux follow without number, among them being that of Chasseneuil, the property of the Count de Brannes, who is the Marquis of Carabas of that part of the world, being sole owner of forest, plantations and meadows alike. The preference of the rich for the right hand side of the road is easily explained by the fact that it affords a magnificent view over the river and terraced slopes of Cœuilly, rising up beyond the fertile plain of Villiers.

As for the public buildings of Charly, so far as the locality possesses such edifices, they are all stretched at one end of the village, that furthest from the railway station, and for this there is a very good reason, the little locality having sprung up piece-meal; as this lovely valley once uninhabited, gradually became full of houses, the church, municipal offices, and gendarmerie, were built last of all. The parsonage and church—the latter a pretty building of Byzantine style, designed by an architect, but recently returned from the French College at Rome—rise up on the very outskirts of the place, and seem to have been crected there on purpose to tempt lovers of retirement to come and build fresh houses further on and thus extend the limits of this charming locality. It is as if the local magnates said to passers-by, "Charly is only yet half built. Prolong it, gentlemen, so that our chief buildings may some day form its centre."

However, at the period we refer to, the passers-by had not taken the hint, so that in point of fact beyond the parsonage there was only one other building to be found, the so-called Pavillon des Sorbiers, a pretty villa in the Italian style, which for a year or so had been the abode of M. Wassmann, the wealthy foreigner, who owned such well-appointed equipages. This country house built, as a matter of course, on the aristocratic side of the road and over-looking the Marne, was situated some three or four hundred yards from the parsonage, so that when M. Wassmann drove to Paris in his eight-spring laudau, as was his wont every day, he had to

drive right through Charly at the brisk trot of his fine horses, those superb animals which so easily overturned children.

As it may well be imagined on that particular evening, this opulent individual had his place among the thoughts of Madame Ledoux as she strode down the long street of Charly dragging poor little Marcel by the hand. Still to do Jacqueline justice it must be admitted that her reflections concerning M. Wassmann were subordinate to her thoughts about her poor cousin Michel. This is why she hurried along with the praiseworthy object of repairing to the château as soon as she had taken the child home. The house of her husband, Pierre, was one of the first on entering the village—on the left hand side, of course, the side of the lower classes—and the market garden, where the industrious man forced his vegetables, extended to the outskirts of the forest. Thus the good woman had not far to go to reach home, but the question was whether she would find Pierre there so as to place Marcel in his charge, for she did not like to leave the child alone in his present state of exhaustion. It was, moreover, necessary to give her husband some explanations so as to induce him to accept the unfortunate gift of a sickly child.

As it happened, Monsieur Pierre, when once his day's work was over, never stayed at home, above all, in his wife's absence, but started off to have a game of billiards, instead of smoking his pipe in his orchard and gazing at the stars. The poor woman who was well acquainted with her husband's habits, had therefore good reasons for suspecting that she would have to hunt for him, and the search might hinder her from warning her cousin Michel as speedily as she wished to do. Unfortunately her fears were too well grounded, and when she at length reached home it was only to find the door locked. "He must certainly be at the Café du Grand Vainqueur," she muttered to herself, starting off again with a stout heart. Marcel, however, was now quite done up, hardly able to stand, and lacking even strength to speak. Fortunately the Grand Vainqueur was within a step—most publicans having elected to set up shop in that part of Charly nearest to the railway station. This particular café enjoyed the patronage of all the local magnates, and every native with any respect for himself, felt obliged to put in an appearance there at least once a day.

After many changes of fortune, the three first landlords having successively failed, the Grand Vainqueur had for the last ten months or so been kept by a certain Mademoiselle Rose, a staid spinster of pleasing manner and mature age; she was certainly quite in the forties. Where had she come from? To whom had she dedicated the springtide of her life? In what manner had she employed its summer? After what tempestuous heart throbs had she taken refuge behind a counter loaded with decanters of brandy and phials of the well-known liquor called "Perfect Love." No one in Charly knew anything precise about her. But people were well aware that she had paid ready money on taking over the business, and this was quite enough for the worthy citizens who patronised her establishment. Indeed very few of them had ever had the curiosity to inquire as to her surname—Mademoiselle Rose *was* Mademoiselle Rose—and no one asked more. Some people whispered she had met with misfortunes, but no one had tried to ascertain what her troubles had been. It seemed probable they were most undeserved ones, that is, judging by the imperturbable calmness and gentle resignation, with which she discharged her duties as landlady. Now Mademoiselle Rose not only enjoyed general sympathy, but she was favoured with the particular esteem of her neighbour, Madame Ledoux. Thanks to her, Jacqueline was kept well

acquainted with her husband's expenditure, and willingly paid for the useful information, by the gift of sundry bundles of asparagus and baskets of cherries. There had thus sprung up between the gardener's wife and the landlady an intimacy of sufficient strength for the exchange of mutual confidences, which almost always bore reference to the innumerable wrongs that the male species inflict upon the weaker sex. Impelled by her anxiety to reach the château, Jacqueline naturally decided to call on her way at the Grand Vainqueur, where she hoped to find her husband, and where at any rate she could confer with Mademoiselle Rose, who would no doubt willingly take temporary charge of Marcel, for she boasted that she was exceedingly fond of children. Being a spinster of ripe years, she was compelled to lavish her affections upon an elderly pug dog and a gouty parrot; but never a day passed that she did not bemoan the fact that fate had deprived her of the joys of maternity. Jacqueline, who was similarly situated with regard to progeniture, tried to console her by saying that her's was not an unmixed evil, as she was at least spared being under the authority of a capricious husband. M. Ledoux would hardly have felt flattered, if he had heard his wife holding forth in this manner, but the two women only related their misfortunes in private. Full of confidence in Mademoiselle Rose's good will, Ledoux's wife took a few rapid strides, and reached the door of the café kept by the sensitive spinster. The Grand Vainqueur was generally remarkable for a glare of light, quite unusual elsewhere in Charly. But on this particular evening its glazed frontage was quite dim. The door was partially open; and by the feeble light of a solitary candle standing on the counter, Jacqueline saw the old maid mounted on a high stool, with her head and arms stretched upwards, busy over something, which so completely occupied her attention, that she neither saw nor heard the entrance of her friend. Thus, when she suddenly felt a slight pull at her dress, she gave a loud scream, and hurriedly leapt down from her pedestal. Had any one discovered her in the act of doctoring customers' hot drinks with arsenic, she couldn't have evinced greater fright. "It's only me, Mam'zelle Rose," said Jacqueline, catching the sensitive landlady in her arms. "But good heavens! what's the matter with you, you are as white as a sheet?"

"Excuse me, Madame Ledoux," stammered the spinster, "it is only—in fact I didn't expect—I was surprised so. You understand, what a start it gave me."

"Yes, a fine one, and had I not caught hold of you, you would have fallen flat on the floor. It was my fault, however, I ought to have called out to you, but I didn't think you were so easily frightened."

"You know quite well, neighbour, that I am very easily upset, especially when I have one of my nervous attacks. I have been suffering from one ever since yesterday to such a degree that I hardly know what I am about."

"And that's the reason you amuse yourself by climbing on a high stool to dust your clock in the dark. What a queer idea!"

"The clock!" retorted Mademoiselle Rose, who still seemed greatly disturbed. "No, you are quite mistaken, it was nothing to do with the clock, it was to kill a big spider. I have a perfect horror of spiders, and then I often feel afraid of thieves, so when I felt a hand touch my dress, I was thoroughly scared. You know how many bad characters from Paris come prowling about here at dusk, and when a woman happens to be all alone—well, you can fancy I did not feel comfortable."

"As if there were any sense in not lighting your lamps earlier?"

"Oh, I don't like to burn oil to no purpose? Now that the fine weather has set in, the gentlemen come here rather late, and it's only a quarter past eight as yet."

"Oh! it's surely later than that, why I took the five minutes past seven train, and the time to walk here from the station——."

"I assure you I just heard the quarter strike," said Mademoiselle Rose, whose voice still shook a trifle.

"Then I must have walked faster than I thought, but that's not what I wanted to ask you. I have a lot to tell you, Mademoiselle Rose. Oh, if you only knew everything that has happened to me this very day!"

"What is it, good heavens?" stammered the old maid.

"I will tell you later on; at present I have only time to rush off if I want to find Michel, besides my husband is not here."

"I saw him pass not twenty minutes ago with a large bouquet he was taking up to the Pavillon des Sorbiers."

"Then he won't be back yet awhile, and if you would take charge of this little fellow here while I go and do my errands you would do me an immense favour."

"Oh, good heavens! I hadn't noticed the little cherub," exclaimed Mademoiselle Rose, "the candle gives such a bad light and then my nerves and where does he come from, the little dear?"

"From the Foundling Hospital, worse luck. That's the sort of boy they expect me to turn into a gardener. I am sure I don't know how Ledoux will take it, not to speak of the bother I have had already with the little chap; would you believe it, he fell under the wheel of a carriage on the Place de la Bastille, and it was the very carriage that belongs to the gentleman who lives at the Pavillon des Sorbiers."

"Monsieur Wassmann?" asked the spider.

"Yes, the wealthy German, and upon my word, I am half glad it happened as it did, considering he has proved to come and see the child to-night. I have an idea that he will pay up handsomely. That's why I don't want to be away too long, for a hundred crowns or so are not to be despised, and this gentleman can't suffer much less, considering the fright we had."

"You think so?" asked Mademoiselle Rose, who evidently did not have a high opinion of M. Wassmann's generosity.

"Certain," I think so, and what would there be so astonishing in his putting down say three hundred francs, a millionaire like him? But I am putting away like a magpie," continued Jacqueline, "and all this time that poor Michel goes in danger of his life. It's agreed, isn't it, you'll take care of this little fellow till I return?"

"Willingly—but——"

"Don't alarm yourself, I shan't be gone long, you will see how good he is. Oh, by the bye, if my husband should come in before I return, don't tell him this is the child I have brought back, it might irritate him for the moment, I'd rather tell him about it myself." And thereupon not waiting for a reply from her fellow gossip, the impetuous Jacqueline rushed out into the street leaving Mademoiselle Rose alone with Marcel.

The poor little fellow had seated himself on a bench on entering the café, and during this long confabulation he had not once opened his mouth. He remained motionless in a corner of the room, silent and apparently quite indifferent to all that went on around him, but neither stupefied nor asleep, for his big black eyes which sparkled with intelligence, wandered eagerly from the old maid in her faded silk gown, to some coloured engravings on

the wall, setting forth the history of Prince Poniatowski. Perhaps the degree of admiration with which these splendours inspired him served to frighten him as well.

Rather perplexed by her temporary maternity, but half recovered from the fright which Madame Ledoux's abrupt arrival had caused her, Mademoiselle Rose hardly knew what to say to this child, who seemed to have fallen from the clouds. She tried hard to make him talk, but being unable to draw any thing out of him, notwithstanding her tempting offers of odd lumps of sugar, she ceased coaxing him, and having seated him on a little chair beside the counter, she resumed her preparations for the evening's business. With her own hands she lighted the lamps, wiped the tables, refilled the partially emptied decanters, and when she had set everything to rights in the big room of the Grand Vainqueur, she returned sadly to her mahogany throne. Was it because her faithful customers so long delayed their arrival, that she appeared pre-occupied and ill at ease? Was she thinking bitterly of old love affairs? of lovers passed far out of reach? It would have required great cleverness to guess. One thing is certain, she often gave a nervous start, and still oftener glanced at the clock behind her. The little boy, with that spirit of imitation which children and monkeys habitually evince, likewise watched the hands moving round the enamelled dial of the old time-piece, and appeared to listen wonderingly to the tic tac of the pendulum.

A murmur of voices soon announced the approach of the frequenters of the establishment, and they were not long in making their appearance. There were four of them, all people of importance, and for different reasons held in high esteem. First came M. Vétillet, a retired hosier who had made his fortune, and was now assessor to the mayor of the locality; then followed Cruchot, the veterinary surgeon, and Verduron, the huissier,* two big wigs of Charly, who lived in freehold houses of their own. Behind them appeared Digonnard, the chemist, who boasted great ability and universal knowledge, and who was as celebrated for his witticisms as for his profound learning and high political aims. He was, so to say, the life and soul of the party which met every evening at the Grand Vainqueur, and his constant trips to Paris, ensured him an important position in this very select company. Digonnard never passed "the city walls," as he expressed it, without going to see the plays which were drawing at the theatres, and he even declared that he associated with the journalists of the capital, so that he always returned home well posted in scandalous stories and exciting bits of news. The only thing was that these expeditions highly displeased Madame Digonnard, who was of a very jealous disposition. It is true she could not speak her mind before her husband's friends, as she was obliged to take his place at the shop while the convivial gatherings of these gentlemen were going on; however, she made up for it when the café was closed.

It precisely happened that the distinguished chemist had arrived from Paris that very afternoon and had come back with a much graver air than usual. By the very way in which he pursed up his lips it was easy to see that if he remained silent it was not because he lacked interesting information, but on the contrary, because he knew more than he cared to tell. Neither Vétillet, nor Cruchot, nor even Verduron, had succeeded in unravelling the mystery; and he had arrived at the Grand Vainqueur with

A *huissier* is a member of the French legal profession charged with drawing up and serving various deeds, such as writs, summonses, copies of judgments, with protesting promissory notes, seizing goods and chattels, &c., &c. For convenience' sake the character in the present story is elsewhere called the "lawyer."—*Trans.*

an overclouded brow. To the gracious salutations with which Mademoiselle Rose especially favoured him he only responded by a friendly patronising nod, as if he were afraid of compromising himself by wishing her good evening. His reserved manner seemed likely to cast a chill over the gathering, and the poor spinster, already full of anxiety, was on the point of giving way to her emotion when the lawyer espied the child seated close beside the counter. From a long course of habit, Verduron never went out anywhere without taking stock of both furniture and owners. However motionless Marcel remained, puny as he was, he could not avoid the lawyer's searching glance. "Hullo!" exclaimed M. Verduron, "where the deuce did that urchin come from? I say, Mademoiselle Rose, you are surely not going to open a school for little boys?"

"Do you happen to be a god-mother, fair lady?" asked the old hosier, who always would have his joke.

"Gentlemen," said the old maid somewhat sharply, "your jests are much out of place. It is a child that Madame Ledoux brought home from the Foundling Asylum this evening, and she has left him with me while she went on an errand."

"Indeed! but why didn't you say so at once?" muttered Cruchot, the veterinary surgeon.

"Madame Ledoux!" exclaimed Verduron. "The child was left here by Madame Ledoux?"

"Quite so, and I am waiting for her to come and fetch him."

"Then you will have to wait a good time for her. You evidently don't know what has happened to her?"

"Good heavens! she surely has not fallen into the hole in front of old Fouinard's shop, has she? The sergeant told him ages ago to put a lantern in front of his door, the wretched old rag-merchant that he is!"

"It's nothing to do with old Fouinard," retorted lawyer Verduron, "Jacqueline met her husband on the way to Chasseneuil—I do not know where he was coming from, but he was as drunk as a fish."

"Can it be true? He who is so perfectly steady!"

"Yes, a fine fellow who can swallow his half-dozen glasses without the least discomfort. He must have been given something rather stiff to drink. I fancy he must have gone to the Pavillon des Sorbiers with some flowers, and that the servants of that wealthy German plied him with Kirschwasser or schnaps."

Mademoiselle Rose, who had seen the gardener go by carrying a big bouquet, was doubtless of the same opinion as the lawyer for she made no rejoinder.

"Well," added Verduron, "it is easy to guess what happened. Jacqueline scuffled with him, he resisted, and I should not be surprised to hear that he had beaten her. At all events there was a crowd in the street, but the oddest thing of all is, that Madame Ledoux who had been the first to pounce down upon him, then absolutely wished to hurry off. She shrieked out like a fiend that she had business up at the château, that she wanted to speak to her cousin Michel. The more she screamed and more she struggled, however, the more strongly her husband clung to her skirt."

"And he prevented her going?" asked the old maid, who appeared interested in the narrative.

"No doubt! Jacqueline can scarcely have proved the stronger of the two."

"I say," insinuated the assessor Vétillet, who ever since his arrival had stared closely at Marcel, "Jacqueline isn't yet out of the wood? At any rate

when Ledoux comes in and sees what an undersized brat she has brought him, I fancy he won't be over pleased ; and if he is still in liquor, his wife will have a bad time of it."

"Let's have a look at the child," said the chemist, stepping in a self-satisfied manner towards Marcel, who was still crouching in his corner. "Good," the vendor of drugs continued, as soon as he had glanced at the urchin's face. "I know what's the matter ; it's as plain as possible. Scrofulous diathesis and rachitis. He needs steel and quinquina."

"To be obtained from your pharmacy, eh? But I don't advise you to count on that patient, my dear Digonnard," sneered the lawyer, "old Ledoux will say that his house is not an hospital, and he will send the little chap back to the authorities."

"That would, perhaps, be a pity," put in Cruchot, the veterinary surgeon. "The little urchin has a sharp look, and I'll warrant that something can be made out of him."

"Gentlemen," exclaimed the assessor Vétillet, jestingly, "we haven't come here to waste our time. Come, let us make up a four-handed game of dominoes. You gentlemen owe me my revenge."

"And me too," said Verduron. "Come, Mademoiselle Rose, two pots of beer, four glasses, and twenty-eight dominoes, sharp!"

The elderly spinster hastened to wait upon her patrons, who seated themselves at a round table, where every evening they fought out an exciting game. As a rule, however, they let politics take precedence of play, and before they furiously rattled the little cubes of bone and wood combined, they expressed opinions on the state of Europe in general, and that of France in particular—opinions, which, although delivered in a familiar manner were none the less of great weight. However, on that particular evening, they all four seemed to have agreed to abandon the abstruse subject of the government of empires. They tossed for sides, and fate made the chemist and lawyer partners against the vet. and the assessor. This distribution of places inspired Digonnard with the remark that fate had wedded science to law. The game commenced, and, meanwhile, Mademoiselle Rose fidgetted behind the counter, as if she had been sitting on red hot coals. Every now and then the pen she used to enter the day's receipts remained in mid-air, posed between her fingers, and from time to time large blots of ink fell upon her ledger. She constantly wiped her forehead with her handkerchief, and every three minutes she raised her eyes to the dial of the clock, one of those tall wooden timepieces that work by means of weights hanging in a case, and the shape, of which, in a degree, recalls the antique statues of the Termini deities. One could have sworn that Mademoiselle Rose was expecting some body. "My game!" called suddenly out the chemist, triumphantly putting down his last domino. "Dash it all?" growled Vétillet, "if it hadn't been for you the game was mine."

"Too late, paterfamilias, too late! You know the proverb : *Tarde venientibus ossa*."

"Hallo! there he goes talking Greek again," said the ex-hosier. "That ought to be forbidden while we are playing."

"In the first place it's Latin and not Greek."

"All right, all right, either that or German or Auvergnat, it's all the same to me—shuffle the dominoes a bit better. The double six always comes over to my side."

"Your turn to begin play, Digonnard," said Verduron.

"All right, I play double blank."

"Dash it all, you always have the blanks."

"Blank five," said Vétillet.

Several dominoes were played in swift succession amid jokes and jeers, and finally Cruchot exclaimed, "Hallo! six everywhere. Come, Digonnard, play up."

"I can't, I haven't any sixes."

"And you Vétillet?"

"I haven't any either."

"Nor I," exclaimed Verduron, "It's a queer go; the game's blocked."

"Sixty-six to forty-nine!" announced the lawyer after counting the scores.

"And so my side loses again," sighed Vétillet. "I shall have to fork out ninepence as I did yesterday."

"Well! it won't kill you, a monied man like you!" said the chemist.

"A monied man indeed! not half so rich as you, you gain five hundred per cent. profit on your drugs. The other day you sold me a draught for my youngest boy, and charged me a franc and a-half for it. Now I've been told it cost you just a fifth part of that amount, bottle included!"

"What of it? You are not aware perhaps that chemical products, unlike those used in hosiery, fluctuate in value from day to day, and that a man must be careful to be on the safe side!"

"Come, come! no more of that! let's have a return game of 150 up," interrupted Verduron.

"Not if I know it, I am not going to ruin myself!"

"All right then, let's stop there," said Digonnard rather sharply; "besides, I have other matters to think of besides that of winning a jugful of beer."

"Very well, gentlemen," said the veterinary surgeon by way of summing up, "let us do like the manager of the Meaux theatre, who wished to play the opera of the 'Dame Blanche' and who had no orchestra."

"Well, what did this Meaux manager do?" asked the retired hosier.

"He announced on his playbill that the music would be replaced by a lively and animated dialogue. So I propose that we should have an equally animated conversation instead of playing dominoes."

"What a humbug Cruchot is!" sneered Verduron.

"Not such an humbug, pray! Look here, I feel sure that Digonnard has brought a pot of news back with him from Paris, and if he would only speak——"

"Yes, but I won't," said the chemist pompously.

"Pooh! is it so very serious, eh?" cried the three other players in chorus.

"So serious that I would not even tell it to my little finger, and besides it concerns some people of Charly, and I don't like scandal-mongering."

"I'll bet that it's something to do with the new priest."

"Speaking about him," resumed Vétillet, "have you ever met him in Paris! It is said he often goes there."

"I don't even know him by sight as he has never crossed the threshold of my laboratory," replied Digonnard scornfully.

"But your shop is close to the church, and you won't make me believe——"

"You know that I never go to church; and that my opinions prevent my doing so."

"Pooh! they did not prevent you selling drugs to the late priest during his illness, and even making a lot of money out of them;" retorted Vétillet, who had taken his loss at dominoes to heart.

"Gentlemen, this isn't the question!" remarked the lawyer. "Let us return to our friend Digonnard's news. If it doesn't concern the priest I can only suggest Monsieur Wassmann."

"The German who has rented the Pavillon des Sorbiers!" exclaimed Cruchot. "That's quite possible after all. There's something very strange about that gentleman."

"Come, my dear Digonnard, are we on the right scent?" asked Verduron.

"You are very hot!" solemnly replied the chemist, who was really dying to speak.

"Then be a good fellow, and don't keep us in suspense."

Digonnard, moved by these flattering entreaties, leant on his elbows and was about to commence his story when the door of the café abruptly opened.

"Hallo!" said the lawyer, "speak of an angel, and you can see his wings."

Never was the truth of a proverb better exemplified, for the person who had entered was none other than the wealthy tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers, M. Wassmann in person. This was probably the first time since his arrival at Charly, that he had set foot in the Café du Grand Vainqueur. And it is almost needless to add that his appearance caused a tremendous sensation. Digonnard, who had been on the point of telling his story, sat gaping with amazement. The lawyer, who had certainly never served any writs upon the rich foreigner, tried to assume an air of mingled dignity and grace. The veterinary surgeon, who had one day had the honour of bleeding one of the dark bay carriage horses, felt himself called upon to rise up and bow to the animal's owner. Vétillet, the ex-hosier, always respected wealth in the person of those who possessed it, but he also coveted it, and thus it happened that his sallow face wore an expression of humility, spoilt by a certain ironical grim. As for Mademoiselle Rose, it was quite another matter. She first turned white, then grew as scarlet as a poppy, and was seized with a nervous trembling, which made her split her pen on her ledger. She was evidently quite confused by the unexpected honour that M. Wassmann conferred upon her by visiting her modest establishment.

Marcel alone had remained utterly unmoved by the great event, for it really was an event, to see this proud and opulent personage in such a place. The only person of Charly to whom this haughty foreigner condescended to bow when he met him in the street, was the Count de Brannes, who, by the way, returned the said bow very coldly. As for the licensed dealers and shopkeepers of the place, he never held any communication with them, save through the channel of his servants, who all of them came from the Rhine, and were almost as stiff as their master. It was, therefore, something prodigious to see M. Wassmann turn up among the domino players, something almost like the appearance of Jupiter on his descent from Olympus, and it was necessary to be a child not to be dazzled by the deity's awful majesty. Childhood, however, has no respect for social grandeur, and the little foundling failed to show the slightest emotion in the presence of this imposing grandee, although he immediately recognised him, as could be seen by the manner in which he looked at him.

It should be added that this German Jove had left all his thunderbolts at the Pavillon des Sorbiers, and that there was nothing alarming about his entry. He favoured the customers of the Grand Vainqueur with a slight nod, went straight to the counter, and condescended so far as to touch the brim of his hat before addressing Mademoiselle Rose.

"Madame," he said in a fairly polite manner, and without displaying the

slightest German accent, "Do you happen to know the wife of a gardener named Ledoux?"

"Yes, sir, yes, certainly I do," stammered the old maid, "Jacqueline Ledoux is my near neighbour; she lives at the end of the lane."

"Then it was all right," resumed M. Wassmann; "I have just knocked at the door and could get no answer."

"Jacqueline was here a few minutes ago, sir, but——."

"Ah yes, she told me, I think, that if she was not at home, I should find her at this tavern."

Mademoiselle Rose would certainly never have allowed anyone else to apply the word tavern to the most noted café in Charly, but it is possible that the Sorbiers millionaire intimidated her a good deal, for she did not dare to breathe a word. The domino players, wounded in their self-esteem, felt a thrill of indignation at this insult, but they did not openly resent it. "I am greatly surprised that this woman did not wait for me," said the foreigner, somewhat sharply.

"She has gone on an errand to the château, I think, sir."

"To the Count de Brannes?"

"Yes, sir, she wished to speak to her cousin Michel, who is keeper of the Chasseneuil woods."

"That's nothing to me," interrupted M. Wassmann with a truly Olympian scowl, "I only want to know if she is coming back, for I wish to speak to her at once."

"Oh, sir, it won't be long before Jacqueline comes back now, and if you would wait——."

"No thank you," said the foreigner throwing a glance around him, which clearly implied that the velvet-covered benches of the Grand Vainqueur were not more attractive to him than the company of the Charly magnates.

"The gentleman's right," remarked Digonnard, who was never frightened for long when in presence of the "great ones of the earth," "It is not at all certain that Madame Ledoux will come back yet awhile, for she is wrangling with her husband, so in this gentleman's place——."

"After all," continued M. Wassmann, without taking the slightest notice of the chemist, it is not absolutely necessary for me to see this woman, and if you will only undertake to deliver a message to her——."

"Anything you like, sir," eagerly answered Mademoiselle Rose.

"This is what I wanted to say. While I was in Paris this afternoon my horses knocked over a child that this woman, Ledoux, was bringing to Charly. He was not hurt, only very much frightened, but I want to indemnify him for the slight accident. So I took the woman's address and decided to call on her myself."

"Oh, yes, sir, and she quite expected you, for she brought the little fellow to me, begging me to take care of him till she returned," exclaimed the old maid, pointing to Marcel, who still remained motionless in his corner.

"Yes, indeed, it seems to me that this is the lad," replied M. Wassmann coldly, "so it is quite superfluous for me to wait here. Come, here are five hundred francs, my boy," he added, placing a roll of gold in Marcel's hands, "They will help you to buy an outfit, as you don't need any medicine."

"One can never be sure of that," said Digonnard, who always pricked his ears when it was a question of medicine. "A fright may have serious consequences let alone bruises, to which arnica should be applied."

"Madame," resumed the generous foreigner, "will you please tell this woman Ledoux, that I shall always feel interested in this poor little fellow, and that if she has any thing to ask of me, I give her permission to write."

"I will not fail to do so, sir," said Mademoiselle Rose, "but Jacqueline would have been highly pleased to have seen and thanked you in person."

M. Wassmann, touched no doubt by the wish which the spinster thus expressed in her friend's name, appeared to hesitate for a moment. "What o'clock is it?" he muttered, drawing a magnificent watch from his waistcoat pocket.

"Five minutes past nine," replied Mademoiselle Rose, after consulting the dial of the old clock.

"No, exactly nine o'clock," corrected the foreigner, looking at his chronometer. "But it is of no consequence, I cannot wait any longer. I wish you good evening; good-bye little man," he added, lightly patting the cheek of the foundling who remained calm and silent, with his big eyes fixedly staring and his little hands full of gold. Thereupon giving a slight farewell nod to the old maid, M. Wassmann walked out without taking any more notice of the four natives of the village than if he had been hovering in mid-air, while they grovelled in the dust.

Scarcely had he gone off than the conversation, interrupted by his presence, was renewed with increased vigour. "Whatever made people say he was so hard on the poor?" exclaimed Verduron.

"And such a screw!" said Cruchot.

"He must be pretty rich, any ways, to put down five hundred francs like that," grumbled Vétillet, rising to inspect Marcel's treasure more closely.

"Hum, all that glitters is not gold," said the chemist, with a knowing wink. "Is not that true, Mademoiselle Rose?"

"What did you say?" asked Mademoiselle Rose, starting on her chair like a woman abruptly roused from sleep.

"Well, arn't there all sorts of reports about this Monsieur Wassmann?" continued Digonnard.

"I'm not aware of anything at all; I don't know him."

"Nor I either, nor any one else in Charly, and it is precisely that which excites one's suspicions."

"Suspensions—suspensions—why so?" asked the veterinary surgeon, who was always well disposed towards people who had six horses in their stable.

"Why, because I defy you to tell me where he comes from, and what he is up to here, and how he made his money," replied the ex-hosier.

"I'll bet one thing, he didn't make it selling socks," said the facetious Verduron.

"That'll do, I know what to think," muttered the chemist.

"Look here, Digonnard," resumed the lawyer, "don't be so mysterious, it is easy to guess you have learnt a lot about him in Paris."

"That's quite possible, but what I *have* heard, I mean to keep to myself!"

"Pooh! you were just going to tell us all about it when the German swell came in."

"Yes. Out with it, Digonnard," urged Vétillet and Cruchot.

"Well," said the chemist, who had allowed himself to be pressed merely for appearance' sake. "Just fancy, I had been to breakfast at one of Duval's restaurants this morning, and as I came out found myself face to face with Monsieur Wassmann, who was dressed, you would never guess how——"

"As a Turk? As a policeman?" asked the lawyer, who was always full of banter.

"No, something more curious than that, as a servant, gentlemen ! Yes, as a *chasseur* attached ! to some nobleman's household, with a green livery, and a hat with feathers in it !"

"What nonsense !"

"It is perfectly true, and the most astounding part of it all is that——"

It was without doubt written in the Book of Fate that Digonnard should never finish his story, for just as he was reaching the most interesting part the abrupt and noisy entry of Jacqueline Ledoux cut him short. "Ah ! good heavens !" exclaimed the market-gardener's wife, sweeping into the room like a hurricane, "Ah ! Mademoiselle Rose, what a terrible misfortune ! My poor Michel, they have murdered him ! I arrived too late !"

The domino players started up in wild alarm, and as for Mademoiselle Rose she fainted right away.

IV.

TOWARDS noon on the morrow of this eventful day, breakfast had just concluded at the Château of Chasseneuil, and as may well be imagined the repast had not been a merry one. M. de Brannes was very fond of his gamekeeper Michel, and the tragical fate of the poor old soldier had deeply affected him. With the real and poignant grief he felt was mingled the natural anxiety of a landlord, irritated by the constant misdeeds of the poaching fraternity whose depredations extended through all the surrounding country, and bound by his position to do all he could to put a stop to them. The murderer had been caught red-handed, at least everything pointed to that conclusion, and it was absolutely necessary to make an example of him ; it was imperative that one should collect such overwhelming evidence against him as to prevent any scandalous acquittal such as had already taken place more than once with other rascals of his kind.

The count had made up his mind to do everything that lay in his power to promote the interests of justice, although he experienced a certain natural repugnance at being mixed up in an affair of the kind. M. de Brannes was fifty years of age ; he possessed a large fortune, and held a high position in the best society ; resolute and upright he was of a generous though somewhat prejudiced disposition. In his perplexity an idea suddenly occurred to him. His nephew, Julien de la Chanterie, his sister's son, left an orphan at an early age, and since attaining his majority the absolute master of an income of some thirty thousand francs, had taken it into his head to become an advocate, not merely in view of securing a diploma, but with the full intention of pleading at the bar. The count had strongly disapproved of this whim, for he considered that if a man of noble birth did not serve in the army he ought to confine himself to improving his estates. His son, Henri de Brannes, had studied at the military school of Saint Cyr, and was now a staff-captain and would continue serving until it pleased him to resign to marry some wealthy aristocratic damsel ; and Julien on his side might very well have chosen the military career. However, the master of Chasseneuil was not over hard on the young lawyer ; there were even days when he forgave him what he called his misdemeanour, as he indeed did on the present occasion. Julien was at hand to undertake what he, the count, could not, or would not do, and indeed the young fellow would be more than willing to follow up this criminal case, for he was partial to clearing up intricate questions, and moreover he had especial reasons for wishing to please his uncle.

Gabrielle de Brannes occupied most of Julien de la Chanterie's thoughts, although he did not see her as often as he could have wished ; and she was entirely dependent on her father, who was a widower, and who, having recently removed her from the convent school, where she had been educated, would probably soon select a husband for her.

The count had clearly perceived that his nephew was much smitten with Mademoiselle de Brannes, and if he did not give him much encouragement, he at any rate did nothing to dishearten him. Taken altogether, Julien would in his eyes be a very eligible suitor, that is, providing he cast his lawyer's profession to the dogs, and pleased Gabrielle.

M. de Brannes could certainly lay claim to such assistance as came within the scope of Julien's profession, and he did not fail to do so ; indeed, it was with that intention that, on the evening of the murder, he had invited him to breakfast at the château the next day. The young man had hastily taken leave of his boating associates, vexed at having gone with them so near to Charly, and early the next morning he arrived at Chasseneuil in a costume which in nowise recalled the strange get-up of Brave Buffalo, the Red Indian. M. de la Chanterie's partiality for the legal profession had not interfered with his naturally polished habits and distinguished bearing. Indeed, in associating with other members of his profession, he had acquired a sprightly wit and fluency of expression, in which many young noblemen of the day are sadly deficient. From his father, a gallant colonel killed under the walls of Sebastopol, he had inherited rare energy and courage ; and from his mother, who had died while yet young, an exceedingly susceptible heart. He was tall and slim, with a frank open countenance, a dark complexion, fine brown eyes, teeth of dazzling whiteness, and an easy graceful bearing. Had Mademoiselle de Brannes noticed his good looks ? There were strong reasons for thinking so, but reasons which it would be difficult to explain or enumerate ; still they had not escaped the keen eyes of the Count de Brannes. Her liking for her cousin was chiefly noticeable by some suddenly developed fancy for eloquence, which led her to read the speeches of such an orator as Mirabeau, who, one can well imagine, was not favourably looked upon at the Château of Chasseneuil. At times too, she would leave a little bouquet, which she had worn on her dress body, on the table, so that M. de la Chanterie might appropriate it, and turn it into a keepsake. But, on the other hand, Julien was sorely distressed by the fact that when Mademoiselle Gabrielle was in his company, she would talk of nothing but the valiant deeds of their mutual ancestors in the Holy Land, regretting the disputatious warlike centuries, when a noble only appeared in helmet and breastplate, carrying his lance ; and pitilessly scoffing at the commonplace existence led by young noblemen of the present day. Sometimes she did not hesitate to declare that she would never marry any one but some valiant knight, who would undertake some dangerous enterprise for her sake, such as going to the heart of Africa in search of Livingstone, the explorer, or discovering the North Pole, or at least killing one or two dozen tigers ! M. de Brannes merely smiled at these flights of imagination, but Julien, who saw no likelihood of being able to hunt tigers in India, or white bears at Spitzbergen, suffered horribly. Still he put a good face on the matter, when exposed to such storms ; and meekly protested that he wished nothing better than to devote himself for his cousin, and that it was not his fault if modern times were so ill adapted to hazardous expeditions and glorious feats of arms. In the main, he knew very well what to think of the whims and tempers of the spoilt child who delighted in teasing him. Gabrielle had a noble mind

and a most generous heart. Why shouldn't she love a man who adored her, and who went his way so bravely? And then, she was so pretty! Her aristocratic beauty lacked the radiance and regularity which compel our admiration; she could not lay claim to the worship of the multitude; to appreciate her at her full worth it was necessary to have a refined mind. But with her graceful figure, queenly bearing, magnificent light brown hair, deep blue eyes, eyes which carried language in their glance, she captivated every one who is sensible to that indescribable gift called fascination. The people of the neighbourhood, however, alleged she had a proud disposition, and was wanting in colour.

On the morning referred to, Mademoiselle de Brannes seemed particularly inclined to contradict her cousin. During breakfast nothing was discussed but the direful events of the previous night, and she listened with deep attention to the touching account of Michel's death and the poacher's arrest. However, she remained silent, which was quite an unusual occurrence with her, and it was easy to see that the sad particulars had greatly affected her. Julien also divined that her excitable mind had been impressed by the mystery enveloping the whole affair, and that, despite herself, she was interested in the man accused of the crime, or, perhaps, in his unhappy wife. He was quite disposed to share her feelings in this respect, but he stood alone in his impartial view of the case, for M. de Brannes was greatly incensed by the murder of his keeper, and his son Henri took it for granted that the individual called Robert was guilty. The young captain had just reached home on a few days' furlough, being attracted to the château by his liking for the pleasures of country life, and maybe by the proximity of a certain country house, past which he intentionally rode once or twice a day. He had been very fond of Michel, under whose supervision he had in former years bagged his first partridge, and the news of the keeper's death had exasperated him to such a degree, that he expressed a regret that he had not been on the spot to blow out the murderer's brains. The breakfast party adjourned to the garden as soon as the meal was over, the gentlemen being partial to a smoke in the shady garden walks, where the count finished explaining to Julien what he expected of him. He had no difficulty in obtaining a promise that he, Julien, would follow up the case, and put himself at the magistrate's service to bring the inquiry to an issue, and convict the guilty man. This being decided, M. de Brannes took his son by the arm, being desirous of remonstrating with him about some private peccadillo, and then went off, leaving Julien to his own reflections. Young La Chanterie was walking dejectedly up and down the garden, when suddenly he felt a light hand touch his shoulder, and on turning he found himself face to face with Gabrielle.

"Would you like to do something to please me?" asked the young girl abruptly. "You would, wouldn't you? Very well, then you must just help me to prove that this poacher is innocent."

Julien hardly expected any sort of request from his cousin and certainly not this one. He had certainly fancied that Mademoiselle de Brannes sympathised with the poacher's wife, and perhaps went as far as to pity the poacher himself. But that the enthusiastic young girl believed in the man's innocence and wished to ensure his acquittal was a thing which had never entered the young lawyer's head. Strange, however, as such a desire appeared to him, he would willingly have tried to carry it into effect; indeed he would have lent himself with delight to the realisation of far wilder fancies, but the question at issue was a most delicate one. Gabrielle's

request arrived at the precise moment that he had pledged himself to M. de Brannes in a contrary sense. The father wished for his help to bring about this fellow Robert's condemnation, while the daughter wanted the poacher saved. Julien was thus thrown into a terrible state of perplexity. Which side should he take? Whom should he obey? The disregard of his promise to his uncle would probably lead to an irrevocable quarrel with him; while it would be worse still if he refused to please his cousin, in fact, it would mean compromising his dearest hopes.

Mademoiselle de Brannes, with her inconsiderate nature, having so suddenly become enthusiastic about the problematic innocence of a thorough scamp, was quite capable of resenting a refusal, and of having nothing more to do with M. de la Chanterie. To make matters worse, he must answer at once, and to the point, for he knew by experience that Gabrielle did not like either hesitation or evasion. However, he tried to gain time by answering her inquiry with a fresh question. "You are interested in this unhappy man?" he slowly said.

"Doubtless, as I ask you to defend him," said the girl without showing the least embarrassment.

"You know very well, Gabrielle, that I am always ready to comply with your wishes," answered Julien in his tenderest fashion; "but I implore you to tell me how the fate of a man, accused of such an abominable murder, can possibly affect you."

"Wrongly accused," asserted Mademoiselle de Brannes.

"What makes you think so?"

"I have seen his wife, whom my father has lodged at the château, and she swore to me that her husband was not guilty."

"But she loves him, could you expect her doing anything else than trying to save him?"

"Then you think we may be deceived in those we love?" said Gabrielle, gazing at her cousin with her large blue eyes, which reflected all the simple-minded loyalty of her eighteen summers. Julien vainly tried to resist that look. "No," he stammered. "No, undoubtedly; I myself was struck by the truthful tone in which he protested his innocence. I recollect, moreover, that the poacher at the moment of his arrest, gave his explanations with calmness and confidence, which made a great impression on me, but since the——"

"Well, what has happened since then?"

"Proofs have accumulated against him."

"What proofs?"

"Proofs of every kind unfortunately. The summary inquiry, at which my uncle and I were present, contradicted the statements made by the accused man. I can't enter into all the horrible particulars with you, discuss the circumstances of Michel's terrible wound, or the finding of the gun-wad close to his dead body; still I assure you that I was most anxious to give the poacher the benefit of any doubt, and I swear it to you I can no longer do so. Your father's convictions are as deeply rooted as my own, and only just now he asked me—in fact he made me promise——"

"What?"

"He made me promise to take his place in pressing forward the inquiries, hurriedly said Julien, who was anxious to arrive at this avowal and forestall the entreaties of his captivating cousin.

Gabrielle blushed and vainly tried to hide a slight gesture of impatience but she did not reply at once. For an instant, the young lawyer, indeed

thought that his last shot had gone home; however, *Mademoiselle de Brannes'* gentle reply speedily undeceived him.

"You speak of overwhelming evidence; it seemed to me, however, that there were certain circumstances quite in the man's favour. Wasn't he arrested while he was fishing for cray-fish in the Marne, in view of selling them to some persons pic-nicing in a tent on the river-bank?"

"Why—I—I hardly know," stammered Julien, dismayed on discovering that *M. de Brannes* had revealed everything.

"What!" exclaimed Gabrielle, pitilessly, "you don't remember that there was quite a gathering of boating men there?"

"Yes, it's true—I had forgotten it!"

The wretched lover wished himself at the bottom of the river, for there was nothing he so dreaded as his cousin becoming acquainted with the circumstances of this hare-brained expedition. "And so," continued the young girl archly, "since your memory is returning to you, you will agree with me, that a murderer would have absconded at once, instead of quietly settling down to fish within a few hundred paces of the wood?"

"It is indeed likely he would have done so," muttered the unfortunate *La Chanterie*.

"Well, it seems to me, if you are unwilling to undertake the man's defence, as I have begged you, you might, at least, communicate with these people, and beg them to give evidence in his favour."

"But it would, perhaps, be rather difficult."

"Why, there was a large party, I hear, several men and women."

"Gabrielle! I swear to you——"

"Stop a minute! I have been told they gave themselves extraordinary names; that will, perhaps, assist you in any inquiries you make. For instance, one of them called himself—What was it? Ah, I have it! The——yes, the Buffalo!"

Mademoiselle de Brannes had not time to add anything more, for Julien broke in with the exclamation: "Gabrielle, I will do every mortal thing you wish!"

"That's all right!" said the young girl laughing, "I knew I should end by winning you over to my side!" And then she continued, but in a much graver manner. "You are doing the right thing now, Julien, don't think for a moment that I want you to act contrary to your convictions; no, I only beg of you to ascertain the truth, the plain truth, without being influenced by other peoples' opinions, or discouraged by appearances, for I believe absolutely in the innocence of that poor woman's husband——!"

"May you be right," murmured Julien, more in love and less convinced than ever.

"And," continued Gabrielle, "I am certain that Providence will assist you in establishing his innocence!"

"What are you two plotting together at this moment?" said *M. de Brannes*, suddenly coming upon the young people at a turn of the garden walk.

"Why, what should we talk about but this sad business," said Gabrielle quickly, so as to get her cousin out of the difficulty in which he was placed. "But where has my brother gone?" she added.

"Henri just left me to go for a ride. It is absolutely folly in the heat of the noontide sun; but for the last fortnight he has simply gone mad over riding, and riding on the high roads too!"

Gabrielle smiled, for she knew perfectly well why the captain preferred the road which ran past the *Pavillon des Sorbiers*.

"Well, let him bask as much as he likes," continued the count. "We have unfortunately other anxieties just now, and you must enter upon your duties at once, my dear nephew. The sergeant of gendarmes and the doctor are coming. I also expect a visit from the priest, and probably one from the examining magistrate, who is to arrive from Paris. The inquiry will be finished this evening I suppose, and I really shan't be sorry, for all these frightful details quite upset me. Ah! I forgot, the gardener Ledoux has asked to see me. He asserts that he has important information to give me respecting Michel's death. To say the truth, I can't see why he does not apply to the magistrate. However, here he comes."

Indeed, Jacqueline's husband was now to be seen approaching down the garden walk, with that slow measured tread peculiar to agricultural labourers, and which one might almost call the country slouch. He had arrayed himself in his newest coat, and stood hat in hand, for although of very independent character, he was not one of those who sneer at social hierarchy, but he willingly gave every one his due, as he was in the habit of saying.

"What is the matter, Monsieur Ledoux?" politely asked the count stepping a few yards towards him.

"It's just this, Monsieur le Comte," said the gardener, after making a low bow to the party. "I wanted to tell you that only yesterday morning my wife received a letter just as she was setting out to catch the train; but I ought to tell you also that she can't read, and so, as I was out when the postman called, she carried the paper off with her to Paris and only returned late in the evening."

"Excuse me," interrupted the count, annoyed by the seemingly irrelevant preamble, "I don't quite see——"

"Wait half a second, Monsieur le Comte! I ought to have begun by telling you that the letter was connected with the case of your gamekeeper——"

"What! with Michel?"

"Yes, Michel. The poor old fellow was my wife's cousin; that was why some one wrote to warn her that he would come to harm."

"What! she was warned that——"

"Exactly, as you will soon see, for here's the letter, Monsieur le Comte," said old Ledoux, handing M. de Brannes a folded paper.

Gabrielle drew nearer to Julien and said in an undertone, "Who knows if it may not be the proof of innocence that I prayed God to send you?"

"My wife wished me to take the letter to the gendarmes," continued Ledoux, whilst M. de Brannes was unfolding the paper, "but I had no particular wish to please the sergeant, and I said to myself Monsieur de Brannes will be glad if I make him a present of the note, and so I came straight here."

"You did right, my friend," said the count, after glancing at the letter: "but it will still be necessary to place it in the hands of the legal authorities for it is an extraordinary document! Just listen Julien," and M. de Brannes began slowly reading the following sentences: "A person who knows that you are related to the gamekeeper named Michel, warns you that his life is threatened, and recommends you to advise him not to enter the Chasseneuil woods this evening; if he dared to go there alone he would be a dead man. This is in good faith, and Michel's life depends on your expeditiousness in conveying him warning. Burn this letter."

"It's indeed very strange," said the nephew, "and of course it is not signed?"

"No, and there is not even the formula with which anonymous letters generally conclude, such as 'a friend,' or sometimes 'Your sincere well-wisher.'"

"Have you got the envelope?" asked Julien of Ledoux.

"That stupid Jacqueline lost it on the road."

"So that we can't possibly tell where the letter was posted. It is most annoying."

"My wife only remembers that it bore a twopenny stamp."

"The postman can be questioned. Perhaps he may have had the curiosity to look where it came from, and may remember."

"That is not so unlikely, as he does not often have to bring Jacqueline letters, so he may have looked at this one more closely than at other people's."

"It is quite possible," said the count, "but how did Madame Ledoux take no notice of this warning?"

"Ah, as far as that is concerned, it is all my fault; Jacqueline came back from Paris just after eight, she brought a little chap from the Foundling Hospital with her—a stupid freak of hers. She left him with Mademoiselle Rose, who keeps the Grand Vainqueur, as she passed, and then started off for your château. But as the devil would have it, she met me in the street, and I was not over steady on my legs, having drunk too much *kirsch* with Monsieur Wassmann's coachman. So she gave me a pretty blowing up. In fact, we had a good row, and while this was going on—"

"Poor Michel was killed," broke in M. de Brannes. "There is a certain amount of fatality about the whole business; but what is to be thought of this letter?"

This question was addressed to Julien, who held the document in his hand, and was examining it minutely. "It is a woman's writing," said the young lawyer, "and it does not seem to me to be at all disguised. The lines are straight, the writing small and sloping in the English style, only the person's hand shook a little towards the end. The paper is superfine glazed, but rather thin, and it still retains a slight odour of patchouli."

"It is most astonishing, quite incomprehensible," muttered the count; "a fashionable lady could hardly interest herself about Michel, who was an old soldier who had spent half his life in Africa and smoked his daily pipe in quietude."

"Add to that, my dear uncle, the fact, that this fashionable lady must be intimately connected with the murderer, since she was aware of his design."

"And this murderer forewarns the person who betrays him, that on a certain evening at a given hour, he means to murder my gamekeeper. It's still more inexplicable!"

"And why in the world should this unknown friend write to Madame Ledoux, instead of communicating directly with Michel?"

"Faith! gentlemen," said the gardener, "I can't make anything out of it any more than you can. It is the magistrate's business to unravel it all. I am not going to mix myself up in it, and by your leave I will go back, as I have some work to do in my garden."

"You are willing to leave the letter with us?"

"Well, considering I came on purpose to bring it to you!"

"I am deeply grateful to you, my friend," said M. de Brannes warmly, "you are doing a great service to justice, for this document may possibly be a great help towards the discovery of the truth."

"I don't very well see how," said Ledoux, "but at any rate, if

Jacqueline or I am wanted, there we are." And having made a respectful bow, the old fellow went away as stolidly as he had come.

"Do you think, uncle," asked Julien, "that it is obligatory for us to put this note in the hands of the examining magistrate?"

"Of course. Why do you ask that question?"

"Because I think that I should make more out of it. The magistrate will probably attach less importance to it; perhaps he will only see some hoax in it. Whilst I could follow up the inquiries in my own way, obtain information secretly and skilfully in the neighbourhood, hunt up specimens of the handwriting of all such people as have known Michel and the woman Ledoux; and, by comparing them with this anonymous letter, elucidate the problem in a decisive manner."

M. de Brannes reflected for a moment, and then said: "It would perhaps be the surer plan; but it is impracticable, and you might even compromise yourself seriously by trying it. Just reflect a minute, at the present time the whole village must know the story of this mysterious letter, and Ledoux won't fail to tell everyone that he has entrusted the paper to me."

"True. It is better to resort to the regular course, but have you remarked the peculiar style used by Ledoux's male, or as it seems to me, female informant."

"No, I did not take any particular notice of it, but if you will again read the note to me——"

"First of all, uncle, the spelling is irreproachable, just like the writing, but, on the other hand, note this faulty expression: 'recommend you to advise him,' it ought to have been 'advise you to recommend him.' The person who wrote the note can have had but an imperfect acquaintance with French. Moreover, the phrase, 'if he dared to go there alone he would be a dead man,' has quite a melodramatic ring. People don't write like that in every day life, or in correct society."

"No," said the count, "and besides that subsequent sentence, 'your expeditiousness in conveying him warning,' is quite in the stiff style of an old dowager; people expressed themselves like that in the days of Louis XV."

"Well, may I ask you, uncle, what conclusion you draw from these peculiarities?"

"I confess that I can come to no conclusion. This warning seems an unanswerable riddle sent from no one knows where to a distant relative of the man it is seemingly intended to protect, whereas it might very well have been sent to him direct."

"But, papa," said Mademoiselle de Brannes, who had so far not taken any part in the conversation, although she had attentively listened to every word of it, "might not this person have known that Michel was acquainted with her handwriting, and might she not have wanted to prevent his seeing it? Perhaps that was why she wrote at the end of the note, 'Burn this letter.'"

"Quite so?" muttered Julien.

"So you were listening to us, my dear Gabrielle?" said the count smiling, "whereas I thought you were up in the clouds!"

"No, no," replied the young girl, "I am here, and I am as deeply interested in this affair as any body in the world."

"Really? I did not know you had such an inclination for criminal mysteries; but since you have a turn that way just give us your opinion of this case."

"I think," said Gabrielle frankly, "that this letter proves the entire innocence of the poacher."

"Oh! oh! please show me how!"

"Very easily, father. First of all it isn't to be imagined that a man of his class could have inspired any interest in a person using scented paper, and writing an English hand."

"Why not? He inspires you with a feeling of interest, if I am not mistaken?"

"And that is not everything," continued the girl, without resenting the count's somewhat malevolent hit; "there is a still stronger reason in his favour. Did you not say during breakfast, that this poacher had been surprised by Michel, in the act of killing a pheasant?"

"Dash it! What a memory you have, mademoiselle!"

"And that he had only committed the crime to avoid being arrested?" added Gabrielle, without being in the least disconcerted.

"That is indeed highly probable."

"Well, if this crime merely resulted from a chance meeting, how could the writer of the letter have predicted it, and given full information respecting it?"

"Gabrielle, my dear child," said M. de Brannes, "I begin to think you were born to wear a barrister's gown. God knows whence you inherited such instincts? Certainly not from your own ancestors, who were men of the sword."

Julien looked at his cousin, with his eyes brimful of a feeling akin to admiration. His ancestors also had been military men, but this did not prevent his being a lawyer, or, considering that Gabrielle was the most charming girl in the world. In the present instance, moreover, he thought that she was right. On this last point his uncle did not agree with him!

"My dear Gabrielle," said the count, in a half mocking, half indignant manner, "I fancy that this problem bears no resemblance to those which were given you to solve at the convent, and it is not right for a young girl to occupy her mind with such a horrid story. Moreover, here comes the sergeant of gendarmes and Dr. Minard, and it is really not becoming for you to remain here listening to their statements."

"Oh, I have not the least wish to see these gentlemen," replied Mademoiselle de Brannes, "Julien will represent me splendidly," she added, giving her cousin a significant glance. And thereupon she ran off towards the château steps, tripped lightly up them, and disappeared behind a curtain of Japanese silk, which closed the entrance of a little sitting-room overlooking the garden. The doctor and the sub-officer, who arrived by one of the side walks, had not even time to catch a glimpse of her.

The sergeant looked radiant, and the doctor also had a self-satisfied air, which did not promise well for the accused criminal. Julien knew from experience that the auxiliaries of the law take a delight in running down the guilty; and from the contentment beaming on the countenance of the two visitors, he concluded that the poacher, overwhelmed by the circumstantial evidence, had ended by confessing his guilt. This disturbed him on account of Gabrielle, whom he believed quite capable of not pardoning a defeat. M. de Brannes, on the contrary, asked nothing better than the avengement of his keeper's death, and he would have been delighted to learn that Robert's guilt was no longer doubtful. "Well, gentlemen? How is the case progressing? Has the examining magistrate come yet?" he asked after returning the bows addressed to him.

"Come and gone, Monsieur le Comte," replied the sergeant, rubbing his hands. "Oh, we've made short work of the business, and I flatter myself on

being pretty quick. At midnight my report was ready and I sent it off to Paris by one of my men. This morning the gentlemen of the public prosecution service arrived by the first train. At eight o'clock the *post mortem* was over: at nine the examination was concluded; at ten we accompanied the prisoner into the Bélière woods for the authentication of the charge; at noon everything was completed, and now I have nothing more to do except despatch the man to Paris. He will sleep to-night at Mazas."

"I am certainly rather surprised that my presence was not requested at the inquiry," said M. de Brannes.

"The gentlemen thought it useless to trouble you, Monsieur le Comte, but I know that you will be summoned to the Palais de Justice to-morrow."

"And so the fate of this unhappy man was not questioned?"

"No, Monsieur le Comte, for fear of some heart-breaking scene, and also because they expect to get more out of her by avoiding a meeting between her and her husband, who can make her say anything he likes by simply looking at her, I have orders to keep a watch upon her and take her to Paris, where she will be examined. Your nephew also will be summoned to appear, as well as the boating party of ladies and gentlemen, and such of your servants, Monsieur le Comte, as saw the dead body. To-day, however, the magistrate contented himself with questioning the curé of Charly, who after all is the principal witness."

"And no doubt some fresh clue was obtained?"

"Ten times more clues than were necessary, Monsieur le Comte, just ask Dr. Minard."

"Oh, my story is soon told," modestly replied the doctor. "My examination proves that the shot was fired from a short distance, for Michel's clothes were not scorched, and yet the shot balled; secondly, there was no struggle between the victim and his murderer, and finally, the shot found in the wound are of the same number as those extracted from the pheasant."

"That is more than sufficient, I hope, to ensure the fellow's conviction," muttered M. de Brannes.

"And it's conclusive even if no other evidence existed!" exclaimed the sergeant, "but everything is going against him, and his guilt is only too plain. Why, as for the gun-wadding which he argued about so warmly last night, well, another has been discovered on the turf where he fired his first shot at the pheasant, and another one has been picked up at the spot where Michel fell. Now these two, with those I picked up yesterday, make four wads in all, two for each barrel of the gun, and it's no use pretending any others were carried away by the wind or rain, for it was a splendid night. So there could have been no third shot, as the scamp pretended."

"That is quite evident."

"It is unnecessary to tell you that Michel's gun was still loaded, which proves that the poor fellow was surprised, and had no time to make use of his weapon."

"In that case," said Julien gently, "it was not he who surprised the poacher, and he did not, as you thought in the first instance, threaten to prosecute him, at which the man retorted by firing his gun?"

"Oh, the ruffian had no need of any similar reason to fire. He no doubt murdered him out of revenge for his previous conviction. And besides all this goes for nothing compared to the evidence given by his reverence the priest."

"What did the priest say?" asked the count; "nothing more, I dare say, than we already know."

"Begging your pardon! yesterday his reverence was so upset that he had not a very clear idea of what had taken place, but this morning his memory returned to him, and when he appeared before the examining magistrate he informed him that Michel was not quite dead when he raised him up, that the poor man had tried to speak in order to name his murderer, and——."

"And that he lacked the necessary strength to do so, eh?" finished the young lawyer.

"Not that exactly, he said enough for one to know what to think. By his trying to name his murderer it's clear that he was acquainted with him. And, in fact, he was perfectly acquainted with the scoundrel, as he had already collared him more than once."

"This fellow was not the only person known to him in that way, so I don't consider that goes for much."

"Perhaps not, but we have better proof than that. Before breaching his last, Michel most distinctly articulated, 'The murderer was the po——'. He did not finish the word, but if that did not signify the poacher, I consent to lose my stripes."

"I am not at all sure, sergeant, that I heard the whole of the first syllable, Michel certainly gave a faint articulation resembling the sound po—— the word he wished to utter undoubtedly began with a 'p,' that's all I can really vouch for."

This correction was made by M. Jean himself, who had been able to approach unperceived, the party being so absorbed in their conversation on this mournful subject. The worthy priest bowed to M. de Brannes, who received him with deferential courtesy, shook hands with Julien de la Chanterie, and bade the doctor and sergeant a friendly good-day. "Well it's much the same thing," said the latter, who did not relish his assertions being commented upon.

"Remember though," rejoined Julien, "There are any number of poachers in this part of the county, and it is quite possible that Michel meant an entirely different individual."

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders and glanced mistrustfully at this self-constituted counsel, who ventured to contradict him every minute.

"Gentlemen," said the Count de Brannes, so as to change the subject, "We are not the judges, but it is our duty to clear the way for justice. Here is a letter that Ledoux, the old gardener, just brought me, and which was sent to his wife."

"I was just going to ask you for it, Monsieur le Comte, to add it to the other documents," interrupted the sergeant; "I just met old Ledoux, who told me all about it, and I remonstrated with him for not having brought it to me at once, last night."

"And I," said M. Jean, "curse my own carelessness. The woman Ledoux had spoken to me of the warning she had received, and if instead of trusting to her, I had hastened to the château, I might perhaps have been in time to prevent this sad misfortune."

"I confess," answered M. de Brannes, "that this anonymous letter almost seems to me to be in favour of the accused. It is fairly well written, and it is difficult to believe that the person who sent it could have any connection with a rascal of this kind."

"Excuse me, Monsieur le Comte," said the sergeant, "on the contrary, it is easily explained as this rascal has not always lived by marauding. He was well educated, was once rich and squandered his money, or rather his wife's money, in Paris. It wouldn't be so surprising if he had some fast

women among his acquaintances, and I am half of opinion that the letter in question was written by some particular female friend of his. We shall end by finding her, never fear."

"How has any information been obtained about him?" asked M. de Brannes with some little astonishment.

"It was received from the Préfecture of Police. You can readily imagine, monsieur, that a ruffian of his stamp has his regular judicial record. I have seen the papers referring to him; a pretty description! Martin (Robert Ernest) enlisted in the 8th Hussars, became non-commissioned officer, and was reduced to the ranks for insubordination; accused of the abduction of a minor, but discharged as the father of the girl withdrew from the prosecution. Robert then married her—she's that same woman we saw yesterday, the strolling singer. When released from the service, Robert became the manager of an agency for procuring military substitutes; five years afterwards he was prosecuted for debt; subsequently compromised in a political plot, he was condemned by default, having succeeded in escaping to England. He returned to France after the last amnesty; and since then has been condemned three times by the Correctional Court for poaching, both as regards game and fish."

"That amply suffices to explain everything," interrupted the count.

"But there is no mention in these papers is there," asked M. Jean, "of the poor woman who had the misfortune to marry him?"

"None whatever, your reverence, the scoundrel reduced both her and the children to starvation. It is not her fault if she has to earn her living by singing in the streets."

"Then she won't be disturbed in reference to this sad business?"

"No, your reverence, she will only have to keep herself at the disposal of the examining magistrate, who may perhaps wish to question her several times. And, as she might take it into her head not to appear against her wretch of a husband, she will be watched. It is even quite probable she may be kept in custody at the Préfecture Dépôt in Paris."

"But supposing that I undertook to place her among some worthy people who would procure her work to do? And that I held myself answerable for her?"

"Ah! as for that, your reverence, you ought to see the investigating magistrate. I shall take her before him to-morrow, and as you are also summoned——"

"I shall go and ask for his authorisation, which I hope he will not refuse me. To-day, Monsieur le Comte, you will doubtless allow me to offer her the consolations she must greatly need?"

"I was just going to propose it, your reverence," said M. de Brannes strolling towards the steps of the chateau, which was a polite way of intimating to his visitors that they might now retire. The doctor and the sergeant took the hint and departed.

The count accompanied M. Jean to the stables, above which the singer was momentarily accommodated, and Julien, actuated by a fixed idea, left the garden by a gate communicating with the Bélière woods. He could not hide from himself, the fact, that but little chance of pleasing his cousin remained to him, if to obtain that result, it was necessary to prove the poacher's innocence. Evidence was rapidly accumulating against the wretched man, and whatever little acquaintance one might have with criminal cases, there was no deceiving oneself as to the fate awaiting him. The young lawyer quite felt this, and in slipping out of the garden he heartily

cursed the strange caprices of Mademoiselle de Brannes. Gabrielle treated him like the wicked fairies in Perrault's story books treated the poor princesses, whom they condemned to sort grains of corn from enormous heaps of barley and rye ; or to disentangle huge skeins of variegated wools. She imposed upon him a task which it seemed utter impossible to accomplish. And yet he was determined to try and accomplish it, and at least to struggle on to the bitter end, even against all the evidence. The anonymous letter had given him a ray of hope. It certainly seemed strange that the poacher should have confidential friends able to write in that style ; but the information obtained by the sergeant of gendarmes had set everything in question again. Taking Robert's former riotous life into consideration it was quite possible that he had kept up a connection with the fast women whom he had once known. There was nothing so improbable about the surmise that he had revealed his revengeful designs to some woman, who, in her terror, had tried to warn his intended victim. However, by dint of reflection, Julien ended by realising that there was another side to the question, for granting that the warning had come from one of this man's female friends, it followed that the said friend was acquainted with Jacqueline's relationship to Michel, since she had written to the market gardener's wife, instead of simply warning the keeper himself. She must have had particular reasons for this course of action. And so, this female friend could not be any Parisienne, she must rather be an inhabitant of Charly, or at any rate she was well informed respecting the kinships of the people of that place. From all these various deductions, which were well nigh irrefutable, it followed that the inquiries must be limited to a very narrow radius. Indeed, on the whole, the letter was rather a piece of evidence in favour of the poacher, for he rarely ventured into the village, and above all he associated with nobody there. He rambled about the woods at night, and when he did not sell his game to passing boating men he smuggled it into Paris, but he took good care not to offer it for sale to the middle class people of the locality. From this it was allowable to argue that Jacqueline's correspondent had no connection with him. At any rate, before arriving at the truth, whatever it might be, it was first necessary to discover the writer of the letter. On that discovery the solution of the mystery depended. If by any chance one succeeded in learning whose hand had penned those ten lines of fine writing which the sergeant had carried away with him to add to the other documents in the case, the name of the criminal would not be far off.

Julien's impartial and sagacious mind was greatly struck by this new aspect of the case, and he said to himself that this was the line his inquiries ought to take, if he wished to fulfil Gabrielle's behest. Still the enterprise was none the less arduous, especially as he was only a passing visitor at the château, and had no intercourse whatever with the people of Charly. How could he manage to become acquainted with them, unless he were willing to join in the games of dominoes at the Café du Grand Vainqueur ? M. de la Chanterie reflected that without being reduced to such extremities, he might easily go and see the woman Ledoux, and discreetly try to obtain some useful information from her ; moreover, he might ask the worthy priest to collect items on his side. And besides there was chance to be considered, and you may always rely a little bit on chance in the affairs of this world. These were but faint hopes to go upon, certainly, but Julien was obliged to remain satisfied with them, for no other course was open to him. His thoughts were thus occupied, as he advanced with some little difficulty

through that part of the Bélière woods, bordering on the garden gate. Before going in quest of any particular person, he wished to study all the circumstances of the crime, on the immediate spot; to examine the glade where Michel had fallen, follow the road by which he had reached it, and note what traces there were of the route taken by the murderer; in a word, to make on his own account the investigations which had been conducted so magisterially by the representatives of justice.

On the previous evening, when the blood-stained body of the unfortunate keeper still lay upon the moss, Julien had had neither the time nor the freedom of thought necessary to examine things calmly. To-day he wished to study the ground thoroughly, to examine the paths and bushes minutely, scrutinise the foliage and even the bark of the trees. He had, moreover, decided to keep his discoveries to himself, if he happened to make any fresh ones, and to work henceforth unaided. It was almost quite natural that he should wish to do without the assistance of the sergeant of gendarmes, since he had elected to pursue a contrary course of action, in fact, to collect materials for the defence, just as the zealous official had gathered them together for purpose of conviction. Julien was perfectly well acquainted with the Bélière woods, which were only a continuation of his uncle's park, and were used as a preserve for the pheasants of the forest of Apilly. He had shot over the woods more than once, though not so often as he would have liked, for M. de Brannes was rather a strict game preserver, and only granted other people the permission to use his private shooting ground on very grand occasions. Julien knew that the underwood covered the hillslope as far as the village, and even a little beyond it. In the direction of the high road, or rather the high street of Charly, there were a pretty thick hedge and a wide ha-ha to prevent trespassing, and yet below the slope along the towing-path, the wood was not protected by any kind of enclosure. Limited in one direction by the wall of the garden and park of Chasseneuil, the wood was skirted at the opposite end, by some undulating meadow land, which extended as far as the outbuildings of the Pavillon des Sorbiers. Here again on this side of the square no obstacle was offered to trespassing. To sum up one might enter or leave the wood on two sides—by the path winding along the bank of the Marne, or by the meadows adjoining Les Sorbiers. The poacher had come and gone by the river path, there was not the least doubt about it, since he himself did not deny it. Now, the keeper, Michel, at the moment he fell, had come from the château by the garden gate. It still remained to be proved, whether anyone else, who was neither the keeper nor the poacher under arrest, had entered the wood and been there at the same time as Robert and Michel. Julien began by searching for the place where the pheasant had been shot, and he easily recognised it. On reaching the three tall trees which Robert had pointed out, he at once identified sundry small tears produced by gun-shot on the bark of the trunk and lower branches; and then he began to measure the distance between these trees and the glade. There were at least thirty paces and no beaten path; so if the murderer had followed a straight line, he must have left some traces of his passage. M. de la Chanterie could see none whatever. It was true, however, that in a like manner none had been left by the gendarmes, the priest, M. de Brannes and himself when they accompanied the prisoner to the spot on the previous night, but perhaps this was because they had been careful to move about slowly and with due precautions.

On the other hand, however, from the standers to the towing-path, there were traces which might be followed step by step, broken branches, torn

ferns and long grass trodden down. Everything went to show that Robert had hastily fled after picking up the pheasant, and that he had darted through the woods, bending low, pushing through the thickets like a wild boar, and only intent upon reaching the open. This first exploration was therefore entirely in favour of the prisoner, and this happy result decided Julien to prosecute matters still further. He returned to the glade, examined the spot where Michel had fallen, and saw nothing noticeable. The turf had absorbed the poor gamekeeper's blood, the little wild flowers which had been bent by the weight of his corpse, had sprung up afresh, and the birds were singing among the leaves. No one could have guessed that a foul crime had been committed here, under this dome of foliage, on this mossy carpet, and Julien was obliged to exert himself to recall the fact that he had not come for the sole purpose of admiring the beauties of nature, which always beholds with an indifferent eye the villainy of men. Julien completed his investigation by searching that part of the wood extending towards the meadow land, and he soon observed with extreme satisfaction that some one must have passed that way. The brushwood and the brambles were broken down just behind a large tree stump, just the thing to hide a man in ambuscade. Ought one to think that the murderer had waited in this particular place for the moment when Michel might pass within range of his gun? Julien asked himself this question, and was astonished that the sergeant had not noted this important point. As the young fellow stooped down to examine the stump more closely, he perceived half covered by a tuft of dry grass some paper, which he hastily picked up, and at his first glance, by the way in which this paper was rolled into a ball, Julien realised that it must have done duty as a gun-wad. The discovery was highly important, and the young advocate immediately understood its full value. If this wad had come from the barrel of a gun, it was evident that three shots had been fired, or one more than the prosecution admitted. By this one discovery the entire theory of the sergeant of gendarmes fell to the ground, and M. de la Chanterie, who was quick of thought, instantly regretted the absence of witnesses, for he wisely guessed that doubts would be raised as to the authenticity of his find. However, he commenced examining it, and noted that it bore on one side traces of the shot upon which it had rested in the gun barrel. Under the heavy pressure of the ramrod, which had driven the wad home, the grains of shot had, in fact, left deep impressions; still the wad had neither been damaged nor blackened by gunpowder, a proof that the weapon had not been fired off. This was a fresh deception which left matters much in the same state as before, and gave new strength to the sergeant's theory. Julien could make nothing out of it at first, but by dint of turning the paper over and over, he ended by remarking some slight tears on the opposite surface to that which had come in contact with the charge of shot.

"Fool that I am," he muttered, "a wad hook made those tears," and on examining the paper more closely he saw that there could be no doubt about it; the murderer had drawn the wad out of his gun, and substituted for this paper some felt washers, such as had been found near the corpse. For him to have had time to plan and carry out this precautionary step he must have watched a considerable time in his hiding place for Michel's arrival, and this conclusion was in favour of the poacher, to whom such a cunning trick would hardly have suggested itself, and who furthermore would not have had the time to execute it. Now for what reason could the guilty person, whoever he might be, have taken the trouble to change his wad at

the last moment? Evidently because he had suddenly remembered that the paper wad might compromise him if it happened to be found, and so without losing an instant he had extracted it from the barrel. It was astonishing that he had not put it in his pocket, instead of throwing it among the bushes; that was strange clumsiness on the part of such a prudent ruffian. But nothing went to prove that he had thrown it there purposely. It was quite likely that in his hurry he had unwittingly dropped this wad and that the darkness had prevented him from finding it. All these deductions, of close but subtle logic, were arrived at by Julien in much less time than it takes us to record them, and he finally concluded that there must be some writing upon this paper. Otherwise, why had the murderer been so anxious to extract it from his gun? Delighted at his own sagacity, and full of hope, the young advocate hastened to unroll this pellet which perhaps bore the key-word to the mystery. He unfolded it with great care, being anxious not to tear it. The paper was thin and of supple texture, and Julien soon saw that he had guessed rightly; it had formed part of a letter, but unfortunately there only remained one half of a single sheet, and further this leaf bore writing merely upon one side, probably because it contained the end of the missive. Scarcely had M. de la Chauterie glanced at its contents, than he realised, with unspeakable emotion, that the handwriting was identical with that of the anonymous warning addressed to Jacqueline Ledoux. He could not make a mistake, he still seemed to behold the fine slanting penmanship of the anonymous correspondent, and its resemblance with that now before him was positively startling. He longed to see if the epistle was couched in the same style, and when after many precautions he had spread out the fragment on the back of his hand, he was enabled to read some twenty unfinished lines of various length, as the paper had been torn lengthwise in a very hasty manner. It, in fact, seemed as if the letter had been hastily crumpled up, after being read, and then torn quickly into two or more strips, only one of which had been rammed down the barrel of the gun, unless, indeed, the others had formed the second wad—the one which could not be found, perhaps because it had been burnt by the gun-powder. It was even allowable to imagine that the murderer had received this unfortunate message at the moment of starting on his hateful nocturnal expedition. However this may have been, the fragmentary epistle presented the appearance reproduced below:—

" Since I have left all to
 " have not ceased a day to
 " my devotion I have borne
 " humiliations, all the tortures
 " position, without complaint, without
 " without one reproach. But self-sacrifice
 " and I shall never have the courage
 " an infamy; for it would be
 " allow it to be thought by
 " am free. There are moments
 " ask myself if thy design is
 " of me, if thou dost not hate me, if
 " despise me, for indeed, O
 " didst really love me, thou wouldst not command me
 " this loyal young man,

"allure him here, to extort from him
"days when thou terrifiest me, when
"of ridding thyself of this keeper who
"formerly in Alsacc. I entreat thee
"renounce this criminal
"repeat that I am mad,
"ask thee in mercy to
"let me go away ! Oh ! if
"how happy we should be
"only one word, and I

When Julien had rapidly deciphered these severed phrases, he did not find himself much wiser than he had been before the discovery of the gun-wad to which he attached such importance. Instead of being solved, the problem had become still more complicated.

What exact sense could be attached to words which did not follow one another, lines which began and never ended? How could one connect thoughts divided into so many irregular shreds? What conclusions were to be drawn from this rebus? Where could the key to the riddle be found? At first, Julien thought he could never succeed in the matter, but after a little more consideration he reflected that a French savant had succeeded in deciphering hieroglyphics, and upon the whole it was much less difficult to complete this fragmentary letter than to discover what language had been used by the priests of Isis. On carefully reperusing the torn paper, he succeeded in divining its general sense. The letter was that of a woman, an unhappy woman, that was quite obvious. This woman addressed a man she loved, who caused her sorrow. It was equally evident that the man in question could only be a wretched scoundrel, capable of abusing this unfortunate creature's affection. There were certain lines which suggested untold infamy on his part; in fact, that word infamy was written there in full. It was also evident from the last sentences that this ill-assorted couple were not permanently established at Charly-sous-Bois, although residing there at the present time. These various indications, imperfect as they were, were nevertheless highly significant, and might with time, lead to the unravelling of the truth. But what was even more important than all these side-lights, was the certainty that this letter had been addressed to Michel's murderer, as was fully demonstrated by the severed line which contained these significant words, "ridding thyself of this keeper;" while lower down the page one read: "renounce this criminal," the word "design" evidently completing the adjuration.

Nothing more was wanted for an opinion to be formed on this important point; and it might be inferred that the woman who had begged Michel's life of his murderer had also attempted to warn the keeper of the fate in store for him—keeping back, however, the name of the scoundrel who meant to strike the fatal blow. Unfortunately there was nothing in the fragment that would enable one to identify the murderer, although his name had certainly figured in the missive, as was proved by the interjection "O" close to which the paper was most unluckily torn away. This "O" had certainly been followed by some surname or Christian name, which would have cleared up the whole mystery, and Julien cursed the fatality by which the paper had been torn in twain at that very point. It was to be noted that the use of this interjection concurred perfectly with the emphatic style of the letter sent to Jacqueline. Who had written the two missives—that

was the question, and the young lawyer determined to retain this precious document and to show it to nobody, rightly thinking, that in such an intricate case, absolute secrecy alone could ensure success.

With the inklings he now possessed, he felt pretty sure of speedily arriving at the truth, and he was racking his brain, trying to think whom this imperfect information could refer to, among all the residents of the little village of Charly, when a new idea suddenly occurred to him, and threw him into a terrible fright, for, if it should prove correct, all his hopes would be shattered.

"Supposing this letter emanated from the poacher's wife?" he muttered in alarm.

The supposition was not at all an unlikely one, and he felt astonished that it had not occurred to him sooner. If it were well founded, there would no longer be any room for doubt. The murderer could be Robert alone. In looking for proofs of the innocence of Gabrielle's singular protégé, the advocate had stumbled on a document which would amply suffice to secure that interesting personage's conviction. It was indeed a turn of ill luck! Julien looked sorrowfully at the crumpled paper, which might perhaps prove a death warrant if delivered up to the officers of the law, and then began comparing the evidence, and revolving in his mind all that he knew of the wandering songstress in whom Mademoiselle de Brannes seemed to take such a lively interest. The priest of Charly had told him on the previous evening that this woman, before sinking so low, had moved among a better class of society, that she came of an honest family, and had been well brought up. That being the case, it was quite possible that she wrote tolerably well, and Julien fancied that the rather emphatic and pretentious mannerism of the two letters coincided with the degree of intellectual culture she must have received. In following out this theory, one would certainly have to admit that this virtuoso of the streets was acquainted with old Ledoux's wife, and with her relationship to Michel; still this was not altogether impossible. Although the singer did not live at Charly, she might have come there many a time plying her wandering calling, and there was nothing to prevent her being acquainted with several inhabitants of the locality. Everything else would tally with this surmise, for nearly all of the imperfect phases corresponded with the attitude of the poacher towards his wife Eugénie. The writer of the letter dwelt on her devotion, her humiliation, and the sacrifices she had made or was called upon to make. These remarks must have flowed readily from the pen of a poor creature who had been tyrannised over and ill-treated for years past. Moreover, the allusion to some *infamy* which the recipient of the letter no doubt intended to perpetrate, agreed very well with the character of this ruffian. Lower down there came an humble petition: *I ask you in mercy, it went on, let me go away.* An easily explained wish on the part of an unhappy woman, who shuddered every moment lest she might be compromised with her children in a criminal case. Even the words, *formerly in Alsace*, were readily understood. Michel had been born at Colmar, a garrison town, and Robert, who had formerly served in a hussar regiment, might certainly have met the keeper there, and his wife probably alluded to this circumstance. There still remained the passage referring to certain *secrets to be extorted* from someone. This alone was difficult of interpretation; the rest was very clear, or at any rate it appeared so to M. de la Chanterie, who suddenly lost all hope.

How could he appear before Mademoiselle de Brannes, to acquaint her

with the dismal result of his investigations? She was already sufficiently inclined to deride his professional achievements, and what would she say of an advocate who, at the very outset of his career, sent his client straight to the scaffold? Julien was, moreover, anxious not to incur her anger, which he dreaded even more than her derision. He had better a hundred times keep to himself the damning evidence of this scrap of paper, and even burn it, as soon as he had made perfectly sure that it had come from the poor singer. On the other hand, his conscience told him that this would be a most serious thing to do; for no one has a right to suppress a legal document, and professional duty called upon him to produce it, so that justice might be enlightened. The young fellow began to realise that it is always a mistake to enter upon doubtful undertakings, and that he would have done much better had he declined the secret mission which his charming cousin had imposed upon him. He ended, however, by confessing to himself that he was not yet utterly beaten—that it was at any rate still necessary to compare the handwriting of the poacher's wife with that of the letter, and that time might throw new light upon the mystery.

He had arrived at this conclusion and had just secreted the precious document in his pocket-book, when he fancied he heard something stirring behind him in the coppice. He turned quickly round, but could see nobody. He had spent fully a quarter of an hour in meditation, leaning his back against the very trunk, at the foot of which he had picked up the scrap of paper, and he thought he was quite alone. At this time of day and considering the great heat, a person must like himself have had some particular motive for rambling through the Bélière woods, which were not adapted to a quiet stroll. Paths were rarely met with, and the only straight road to be found ran along the park wall. There it was that the count stationed his guests, when he did the honours at a grand pheasant battue, and it was a fine place to shoot from. But this part of the wood, furthest removed from the château, was but a succession of thickets in which the game found a safe retreat, for M. de Brannes, who was a great sportsman and very rich, did not cut down wood for sale, preferring to have plenty of good cover in October, when but little game was left in the fields. People, therefore, seldom penetrated the thick scrub, excepting the beaters on great field days, and at times some poachers and the keepers in search of them. Michel had been killed just at the point where the underwood, not so thick on the side of the park, ceased to be easily accessible, and Julien was on the outskirts of the denser bushes. He naturally thought that the sound which had roused him from his reverie proceeded from a startled rabbit seeking its hole, or from an old cock pheasant disturbed in its meditations. However, he instinctively continued listening, and he soon detected more distinct and characteristic sounds. Branches were crackling in the distance and dry leaves rustling, under a heavy wary tread which was certainly not that of an animal. Julien was endowed with very acute hearing, and he even thought he could recognise the peculiar scratching sound caused by thorns catching in a man's clothes as he pushed through a thicket. There was no longer any doubt about it, some one was walking near him, and walking cautiously so as not to be heard.

It seemed strange to Julien that any person should wish to remain unperceived in full daylight, as if he had been a midnight burglar, and he was asking himself what could be the meaning of it, when suddenly it occurred to him that he was being spied upon. By whom, and with what object? He could not yet guess, but he kept perfectly still, waiting for the move-

ments to become yet more distinct. There was still a low sound of footsteps, but the noise, instead of approaching, grew more and more distant. "If it should be the murderer," he concluded by saying, "the murderer, who was, perhaps, coming here to look for the compromising gun-wad, which he remembered having lost, the murderer flying off because he caught sight of me! But in that case—the criminal can't have been the poacher."

To put an end to all his doubts on the subject, M. de la Chanterie began shouting at the top of his voice: "Who goes there?"

No reply was forthcoming, but the crackling became twice as loud, and the intruder's pace far more rapid. This at once made it evident that the man had important reasons for not showing himself, and that he was now trying to escape. "Ah! this time at any rate, I'll find out the truth," said Julien to him, as he rushed head foremost into the thicket.

A man must be of the age that knows no fear, and in love into the bargain, to rush unhesitatingly into a similar adventure. The fugitive, whoever he might be, was to all appearance animated by sinister designs, so in all probability he was well armed, and would use his weapons sooner than allow himself to be captured. Julien had not even a walking stick wherewith to defend himself, and, furthermore, he was so lightly clad, that merely in pushing through the thick bushes, he exposed his skin to the risk of terrible tears and scratches. He was daunted by nothing, however, not even by the prospect, such a disagreeable one for a young and handsome man, of returning from his man-hunt with scarred cheeks, a damaged nose, perchance an eye put out by a briar. The fugitive had made off as fast as possible, and from this moment a desperate chase commenced. M. de la Chanterie was not worsted, in so far as he maintained his distance, at the price of unheard of efforts and innumerable scratches, but he did not succeed on gaining on his adversary. He followed on his *scent*, as sportsmen say, that is to say he was guided by the noise, for the underwood was too thick to allow him to catch sight of the person he was pursuing. Two or three times, however, he spied the end of a blue blouse caught for a moment in the thorns, and speedily released, but this was all, the man's figure and face were never visible. Still Julien was not discouraged. He had noticed that the man was flying in the direction where the wood was skirted by a meadow of some extent, and he said to himself that on being driven to the edge of the wood, the rogue would have to take to the open and thus show himself.

A prudent fellow would have reflected that herein lay the danger, and that the fugitive forced from his last retreat would turn upon the pursuer as a wolf makes head against hounds. But Julien thought only of obeying Gabrielle, and Gabrielle had said: "You must help me to prove the poacher's innocence." So he now redoubled his efforts. He no longer doubted that he was on the murderer's track, or at least on the track of some accomplice, and he was ready to risk his life even, to get a glimpse of the man's face. The decisive moment approached, for this desperate chase had been lasting for ten minutes without any advantage on either side, and the meadow could not now be far off. The underwood had become scantier, and Julien, noting the fact, already felt delighted at thinking the race was won, when suddenly he fancied he saw the fugitive change his path and diverge to the right, that is to say towards the lower part of the wood. Soon, there could be no possible doubt on the point, for the noise came from the brush covering the slope a little further down. Julien turned in this direction although the fugitive's sudden bend made him somewhat anxious. Did this scoundrel mean to defend himself by doubling on Julien in the thick

shrub like a hunted deer? The young fellow began to suspect so, but although already very tired and still more out of breath, he was quite determined to hold on till the finish, that is as long as his legs would support him. Fortunately, the chase never took this turn. On the contrary, the fugitive made up his mind, and commenced descending the slope in a straight line. This course would necessarily bring him out on the bank of the Marne, which flowed along below the Bèlière woods. He would still be obliged to leave the cover, but instead of being under the necessity of crossing a wide expanse of meadow land, in full view of a spectator, he would reach a narrow bank with the choice of following a well-frequented pathway, or leaping in the river—alternatives, which barely gave him a chance of escaping Julien's sight. He no doubt realised his danger for he quickened his pace still more, probably with the aim of gaining space and time enough, to disappear round a sudden turn of the towing-path, ere his adversary had left the wood. He careered onward like a cannon ball through the thickest clumps of underwood, and leapt like a stag over the tallest bushes. In a few moments he would reach the edge of the cover.

Julien was quite aware that the critical moment had arrived, and so he collected all his energy to make a supreme effort, like a race-horse who is given his head at the distance so that before reaching the winning post he may pass a rival now two or three lengths in front of him. He, indeed, put on such a spurt, and went at so great a pace, that he would probably have come up with the run-away at the moment when the latter reached the pathway. But, most unluckily, in the very middle of a leap, eclipsing all his previous efforts, his foot caught in a bramble, and he fell forward with his arms outstretched. The shock was all the greater as the ground sloped steeply downwards, and to heighten the young lawyer's misfortune, he had fallen headlong among thistles and briars. He narrowly escaped losing an eye, and was badly scratched on his hands and face. However, he retained his presence of mind sufficiently to try and rise at once, but this was not easily accomplished. Such props as were near at hand consisted mainly of yielding boughs studded with thorns. They gave way under his weight as soon as he caught hold of them, and the only result was that he pricked his hands severely. In addition, his feet had caught in the under-brush, and the more he tried to free them, the more the prickly creepers twisted round them like snakes in porcupine garb. To complete Julien's despair, there was no longer any sound of the fugitive. He had plainly succeeded in escaping from the underwood, and was now flying at full speed along the level road. All was not yet lost, however; there was still a chance of coming up with him in the open. Julien, greatly excited by this remaining hope, kicked and struggled with such strength that he ended by kicking loose from the tangled shrub, and found himself once more at liberty; but not without leaving sundry shreds of his clothes, and even of his skin.

Then he rushed wildly towards the edge of the wood which was now but a few paces in front of him, and to set every chance on his side he began shouting at the top of his voice: "Stop thief! Murder!" hoping to give the alarm to any people as might chance to be on the river bank, and induce them to seize the scoundrel as he was making off. Reaching the outskirts of the wood, very excited, but by no means discouraged, he leapt into the middle of the towing-path, where a great deception awaited him. The path stretched away to right and left like an endless yellow ribbon, edging the green robe which decked the river's brink, and was at last lost to view in the distance, there being no turns, hillocks, or intervening obstacles of any

kind. In front flowed the Marne, peaceful and silent, its waters unruffled by any skiff or barge. Neither to the right, nor left, nor in front for the matter of that, was there a single living being to be seen. There was no sound save the hoarse chirp of the grasshoppers, celebrating the fierce Saharian heat after a fashion of their own. It was really most marvellous. The fugitive had vanished without leaving any more trace of his flight than would a summer cloud or evening mist; though he certainly had existed, possessing a very strong and enduring frame, to judge by the desperate way in which he forced his way through the bushes.

Julien, now utterly amazed, would have thought he was dreaming, had not his bleeding face and hands borne witness rather unpleasantly as to the reality of his strange adventure. He vainly tried to compose himself, examined the ground, reflected on all the suppositions that presented themselves, but could not arrive at any reasonable conclusion. The meadow-land lay near at hand, still it was too far off for the man to have reached it. Then there was the wood into which he might have returned intending to lie perdu and silent, whilst his pursuer continued the chase. But he could not have adopted this course without making some little noise, and M. de la Chanterie felt perfectly sure that he had heard nothing beyond the sound of distant feet gradually dying away over the open ground.

Still he was about to search the underwood, when, in passing the ditch which bordered one side of the path, he suddenly came upon most unexpected traces of the fugitive. Amid a clump of nettles he espied a bundle of clothes, which he rushed at with an ardour like that of Robinson Crusoe, when Defoe's hero bent down to scrutinise the print of human footsteps on the sand of his desert island. This bundle which had evidently been hastily made up, comprised a blue blouse and canvas trousers such as workmen wear over their other clothes. There was also a large check cotton handkerchief, having two strange round holes, of precisely the same size. These wretched articles of apparel were torn to shreds, leaving no doubt as to the purpose for which they had recently served. The fugitive had certainly worn them, while scouring the Bélière woods and he had just rid himself of them, so as to escape the better, or rather so as to alter his appearance, and thus mislead his pursuers. The handkerchief with the holes had no doubt served as a mask so as to conceal his face, at the same allowing him free use of his eyes. Julien remembered that this mode of disguise was frequently resorted to by poachers anxious to avoid being recognised by keepers, and he again asked himself whether he were not on the track of some associate of that fellow Robert, the miserable protégé of Mademoiselle de Brannes. At any rate the discovery was an important one and it was possible someone might recognise these tattered garments; it was best, however, to try and catch their owner at once.

The clever blade who had thus so speedily divested himself of his clothing, on finding that his pursuer was gaining on him, could evidently not have fled very far; still where could his lurking-place be? The spot was ill adapted for purposes of ambuscade, as beyond the wood, the ground was flat and open. However, it occurred to Julien that the rogue might easily have slipped into the water, have gone down the river, swimming along close to the shore, and have landed when he thought himself safe. At this season there was nothing unlikely about such a performance, only it would oblige the swimmer to dry himself in the sun before starting on his road again. By making haste M. de la Chanterie might yet surprise him in the stream. So he lost no time, and leaving the old clothes where he had found

them, rapidly crossed the path and ran towards the river's bank. He was about to descend it when on giving a glance below him, he stopped short, rivetted to the ground with surprise. At this spot the bank was almost perpendicular, but a few paces up the river it sloped gently down, and formed a grassy margin edged by clumps of rushes and shaded by a few alder trees with knotty trunks. The spot seemed expressly contrived for resting and musing, flirtation, or a quiet day's angling: but on this occasion it was occupied by an individual who was neither a dreamer nor a lover, nor even a persecutor of unhappy gudgeon.

Seated on a camp-stool and sheltered by an immense sunshade fixed erect in the soft soil, this lover of nature's beauty confronted a canvas resting on a portable easel. In his left hand he held a palette, and in his right a brush which he dabbled with most energetically. His head moved up and down incessantly, with the almost automatic motion so common to landscape painters who are obliged to glance alternately at their colours, their picture, and the site they are painting. Julien saw little more of the man's face than a bit of carrotty whisker, but he had a full view of his costume, which appeared to him irreproachably fresh and elegant. A fine straw hat with a blue ribbon, a puggaree like officers wear in Algeria, striped trousers of some light textile fabric, gaiters of the same material, and patentleather shoes—such was the garb worn by this artist—an artist such as one does not meet with every day, for he looked as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox; and his get-up was so unlike that of a professional painter, that Julien became suspicious the moment he caught sight of him.

However, if the stranger hardly looked like a genuine artist, he in no wise resembled a rover of the woods, and it was absurd to think that a man so faultlessly attired could have emerged from the thorny underbrush of Bélière. The blouse and trousers found in the roadside ditch were not sufficiently strong to have served as armour and protected the exquisite suit of clothes worn by the gentleman in question. And then those patent leather shoes! They would most certainly have remained in the thickets, if their owner had by any chance been the same man as the one whom Julien had so energetically pursued. On the other hand, what an eccentric idea for a landscape painter to choose the noontide heat as a suitable time for painting in the open air, when the vertical rays of the sun naturally destroy all effect of light and shade, and spoil the aspect of even the most exquisite scenery!

The young advocate had some acquaintance with the artistic world, and he was certainly amazed at this predilection for noontide; moreover, what particularly struck him, was that this chance meeting coincided with the disappearance of the fugitive. A ragged tramp had vanished into mid-air at the very moment when Julien hoped to capture him. A freshly attired painter appeared on the scene at this exact moment, and almost on the very spot where the other had disappeared. Such things only happen in *Cinderella*, *Pack*, or fairy stories of the kind, in which gourds are changed into grand carriages, or beggars into princes, by a simple touch of the magician's wand. But the bare banks of the Marne, and the ditch bordering the towing-path, could not be suspected of harbouring *genii* of the kind. M. de la Chanterie was perfectly aware of it, and yet he could not help suspecting this unknown individual.

At all events, the artist must have been deeply absorbed in his work to have remained quite undisturbed amid all the noise made so close to him,

such as the crashing of the branches in the wood, the tramp's flying along the path, and more especially the cries which Julien had raised; all this ought to have attracted his attention, and yet he had not budged! He had allowed the scoundrel time to change his clothes without even condescending to move from his seat, while only fifty paces away there were shouts of "Help!" and "Murder!" Was it possible that he had not heard anything? Certainly not; the only explanation of it could be that this painter was gifted with a remarkable amount of composure; unless, indeed, as there was strong reason for thinking, there were some mystery in the whole affair.

Julien, who was inclined to take the latter view of the case, wished to clear his mind of the doubts he had, so he rapidly walked along the river bank, and when overlooking the spot where the painter sat, busy at his work, he began calling to him, "If you please, Monsieur!"

The man turned his head without hurrying himself, however, and displayed a cool and emotionless face, unknown to M. de la Chanterie, though he had an indistinct recollection of having seen it somewhere before. Then after glancing at the person who had called him, the artist shrugged his shoulders and resumed his work, with perfect unconcern. The impertinence of the proceeding was obvious, and it made Julien furious, just as he especially needed to retain all his self-possession. To tell the truth this individual treated him as he might have treated any tramp on the highway, whom he would not deign to answer. Now, the nephew of the Count de Brannes had always moved in the best society, where such manners are never tolerated, and, moreover, being very hot-headed, he immediately forgot all about his pursuit, in order to give a lesson in good breeding to the clown who dared to treat him in that style. With three rapid strides he reached his side, and said to him somewhat roughly: "I have already spoken once to you, sir, and shall be obliged by your replying to me."

The imperturbable landscape painter looked him straight in the face, and began to whistle in a low key, but he did not utter one word, and, indeed, he was again turning to his work, when Julien, quite exasperated, stretched out his hand to seize him by the collar. Immediately and with the greatest dexterity, this silent personage transferred his paint-brush to his left hand, and then with the right one drew from his pocket a revolver with an ivory handle, which he levelled at the head of the person who had so rashly dared to disturb him.

The hasty young advocate was on the point of closing with his antagonist, for this Yankee reception only served to increase his rage, and the village of Charly narrowly escaped being the site of a second tragedy as deadly as that of the previous evening; however, a sudden ray of good sense showed Julien the futility of engaging in a struggle without arms, or witnesses, and with an exasperated ruffian who was a quick hand at revolver practice; accordingly, with the greatest possible effort, he controlled himself for a time. "Ah! sir," he said, "I won't give you a pretext for murdering me, as you seem anxious to do, but I swear that things won't stop like this between us, and you will have to give me satisfaction for your insolence."

This time the silent painter replied by a sarcastic sneer, and replacing the revolver in his pocket, slowly said: "Give you satisfaction? To you?"

"Yes, to me, sir, whom do you then take me for?" exclaimed M. de la Chanterie, stupefied by this reply.

"I take you for a mad-man. Just now, I took you for a beggar or a tramp."

This cool reply made Julian reflect for a moment. That he appeared

something like a madman was quite possible ; and it was equally possible that he looked like a beggar or a tramp ; to convince himself of the fact, he had only to glance at the wretched state of his clothes. Mademoiselle de Brannes's daring champion had quite forgotten the fact that, in striving to accomplish the task set him by his enthusiastic cousin, Gabrielle, he had reduced himself into a pitiable condition. With his tattered clothes he had the picturesque appearance of the tatterdemalions of Callot's etchings, and it was impossible to guess that his garments had come from a fashionable tailor's. His trousers were torn from the ankle upwards in jagged rents, while his sleeves were gashed like those of a doublet of the time of Francis I. Moreover, his scratched face, his skinned hands, his hair tangled with blades of grass and dry leaves like the head of a sylvan deity, really made him closely resemble what you would call a prowler of the woods, or something worse. He was obliged to confess that his foul appearance was not calculated to inspire a man so correctly attired with either respect or confidence, and, accordingly, he answered in a softer key :

"I readily believe, sir, that the state of my apparel may have prejudiced you against me, but my face and language suffice, I think, to convince you of your error, and when I have told you my name ——"

"I have not the least wish to know it," interrupted the painter, who was again working at his picture harder than ever ; "I am quite ready to overlook the misunderstanding, since you state that it is one, but I see no necessity to prolong the conversation."

"Be it so !" answered Julien drily. "I don't care any more than you do to continue the conversation ; but I have some information to ask of you, and beg you to give me it at once. You must have seen a man running past you a few minutes ago ?"

"I have seen nobody ; for the very good reason, that I have not stirred from my present seat. As it is ten feet lower than the road, it is quite impossible for me to see anything going on above."

"But, at least, you must have heard him running ?"

"Possibly, I might even say probably ; only I did not pay the least attention to the sound, having no more reason to bother about the man you speak of, than about the person on horseback whom I hear coming along."

"A man on horseback !" exclaimed Julien, "perhaps he has met the very fellow."

"Well, the rider is approaching us, and at the pace he is going he will reach us in two or three minutes' time," said the artist coolly, "I advise you to obtain your information from him ; as for myself, I can give you no assistance whatever."

Julien neither replied nor stirred. He listened to the clatter of horse's hoofs coming at a trot from the direction of the meadow, and rapidly approaching ; and he determined to detain the rider for a moment when he came up, but he had not yet done with the landscape painter. Everything about this man seemed suspicious to Julien ; his mania for painting in the noontide heat, his insolence at their first meeting, and his affected indifference as to what was passing around him. It was indeed enough to make one believe that the clothes thrown into the ditch really belonged to him, that he had found time to rid himself of them, and place himself, brush in hand, on his camp-stool, while his enemy was struggling in the thicket where he had so unluckily fallen.

M. de la Chanterie examined the painter with a critical eye, but there was not the slightest disorder about his attire—not even a crease in his

shirt front, and not a scratch on his skin ; while his hair and whiskers were as carefully combed as if he had just left a barber's shop. Besides, an examination of his shoes sufficed to dispel all suspicion of a race through the woods. These pumps fairly glistened in the sunlight, and like the stranger's silk socks, drawn on as tight as a pair of gloves, they could never have come in contact with brambles. A man so sprucely attired could not in any way be identified with the fugitive ; only it was possible that he was acquainted with the latter, and so it was necessary for Julien not to lose sight of him until he had ascertained who he was, where he came from, and why he was at Charly. The moment seemed opportune for the young advocate to renew his enquiries, for the horseman was now near at hand, to serve as a witness, and to render assistance in case of any violent altercation.

"Well, sir," resumed Julien, "I shall not fail to follow your advice in questioning the rider now approaching ; but pending his arrival, I must beg of you to explain how it happens that you did not hear me when I shouted 'Murder !' with all the strength I could muster."

"No doubt because the east wind carried your voice in an opposite direction," said the painter in a peculiar tone, and appearing more absorbed than ever in lightening the sky of his painting.

"Very well ; but it is no longer blowing from that direction, and pray, understand that we are discussing a serious crime."

"Nonsense, you don't really mean it ?"

"Yes ; a crime the author of which I have been pursuing, or if it was not he, it was at any rate one of his accomplices."

"You are a police officer then ?"

"No, sir ; but it is the duty of every honourable man to further the course of justice ; that is what I am engaged in at the present moment, and if I don't obtain a satisfactory answer from you, I shall have a right to believe that you are taking the criminal's side."

"What criminal ?"

"The one who hastily dashed out of the wood but a quarter of an hour ago, and who must needs have passed close to you."

"I have already told you I saw nothing and heard nothing, and that I cared nothing whatever about any passer by ; but I confess you end by exciting my curiosity somewhat. What crime has the poor devil committed to make you hunt him down like a rabbit ?"

"A murder."

"What ! someone has been killed in the wood yonder, and only just this very minute ?"

"No, it was yesterday evening that someone was killed, and not on this side of the wood. But the criminal returned just now to recover a serious piece of evidence against him which he had imprudently left on the very spot where his victim fell ; I was beforehand with him, however ; when he arrived I pursued him, and was just upon him, when my foot slipped —"

"Do you know, sir, your story really begins to interest me ?" said the painter quite gravely, "May I ask you what this serious piece of evidence was ?"

"A letter, sir, a letter addressed to him, and which he used as a gun-wad."

"How do you know that ?"

"I know it because I have found the letter in question, and what is more I have it in my pocket-book, and I will undertake to find out the person who

penned it even if I have to make every resident of Charly write before me, one after the other."

At this moment the horseman whom the young advocate had momentarily forgotten arrived upon the scene, and began shouting loudly:

"Julien ! Julien !"

M. de la Chanterie turned round and perceived his cousin, Captain Henri de Brannes, mounted on a magnificent half-bred mare, which he with difficulty kept in at a walk.

"What the devil are you up to there?" ejaculated the officer, "And where do you come from? You look like Frederick Lemaître playing in the Auberge des Adrets. Whatever made you get yourself up like that? Has anyone been trying to murder you too?"

Delighted at being reinforced in the person of his cousin and friend, Julien was about to reply by a statement on the whole business, but Henri did not give him time. Scarcely did he espy the landscape painter than he bowed to him with marked politeness, and then dismounting, led his horse forward by the bridle saying: "I beg your pardon, sir, but I did not see you, and so little expected to find you here—but I am all the more glad of it, as I have just called at your house."

"I regret," said the painter, "that you should have done so to no purpose, but I left home early this morning and——."

"Oh, really ! with your leave I will call again shortly," interrupted the captain, "but I must first introduce to you my cousin Julien de la Chanterie ; unless he be already known to you."

"This is the first time I have had the pleasure of meeting this gentleman."

"Then I am delighted to have an opportunity of introducing him to you; Monsieur de la Chanterie, advocate and doctor of laws," continued Henri, pushing his relative gently forward, and to complete the introduction he said, "Monsieur Wassmann, an officer in the service of His Majesty the Emperor of Austria, and our near neighbour."

"Indeed !" exclaimed Julien, "You are the gentlemen living at the Pavillon des Sorbiers."

"Yes, sir," said the stranger, bowing, "and had I been aware I had the honour of speaking to the nephew of the Count de Brannes, my reception would have been a very different one, I beg of you to believe it, but I could not guess who you were, dressed as you are."

"Of course not !" resumed Henri, "I don't understand it myself. Come, my dear cousin, what has happened to you?"

"A most peculiar business," answered Julien with a glance at M. Wassmann, "I was walking in the Bélière woods, near the very spot where poor Michel was murdered, when I heard sounds of footsteps. I called out, but, whoever it was, instead of replying, hurried off; whereupon I pursued the fugitive through the thicket, but he ended by rushing out of the wood in this direction before I could come up with him."

"And you saw no one on leaving the wood?"

"No one excepting this gentleman."

"What do you mean——."

"Well," said M. Wassmann, smiling, "I had been here about an hour painting this lovely bend of the river—I have a passion you know for spoiling canvas over things of this sort—and this harmless taste of mine caused Monsieur de la Chanterie to take me, so I fear, for a dreadful criminal."

"Really !" exclaimed the captain. "The *quid pro quo* is most amusing,

but you must not be angry with my cousin. This abominable murder has turned the heads of every one up at the château, and we think of nothing but inquests, criminal investigations, and all that sort of thing——”

“Oh! There is no need of any apology,” interrupted the stranger, most graciously; “but I fancied I had heard that the guilty person had been caught.”

“Yes, yes, we have him right enough, thank heaven!”

“But he may have accomplices,” said Julien warmly.

“Quite so,” seconded M. Wassmann, “and every effort should be made to find them; indeed I hope that the authorities will succeed in catching them, for this crime has aroused the indignation of all Charly. At the moment it was committed, at nine o’clock, yesterday evening, I chanced to be in a café in the village, and on my way home I learned the news. All the people I met in the streets were cursing the murderer.”

“Indeed, sir,” now exclaimed Julien, “you were aware that one of my uncle’s keepers had been killed last evening, and yet just now, when I questioned you respecting a man who had escaped me, you refused to give me any answer?”

“Allow me to remark,” gently said M. Wassmann, “that I was utterly unacquainted with you, and further, that you had previously addressed me in somewhat excited terms.”

This change of tone made M. de la Chanterie reflect. A well-bred man is never quite indifferent to moderation of language and politeness of manner; and Julien, so irritated but a short time previously, now began to ask himself if he had not misjudged the stranger. However, this thought was quickly set aside when he remembered the peculiar manner of the gentleman painter when they first met. Accordingly the young advocate decided to reserve his attacks for the present, and yet to have a proper explanation on the subject from his whilom antagonist. “I regret, sir,” he said, with perfect politeness of manner, though, it must be owned, somewhat coolly, “I regret having lost my temper to such a point, but under the circumstances perhaps it was not altogether unnatural. I, for my part, was equally ignorant of your name, and I certainly could not guess it from the very evasive language in which you couched your replies. And I confess that I cannot yet understand why, as you knew of the murder of my uncle’s gamekeeper, you made me relate all I knew about it, you yourself being acquainted with these particulars.”

“Excuse me,” said M. Wassmann, “I only knew the public report, and the questions you put to me were not calculated to throw any light on the subject. You spoke at the same time about a letter you had found in the wood, and of a run-away man who must have passed close here——”

“I am perfectly sure that he passed,” broke in Julien.

“And I am equally sure that I never saw him. Besides it can be easily explained. The man you pursued can readily have gone down the towing-path or have escaped into the meadow land without my seeing him, I was absorbed with my painting, and I took no notice of what went on around me. But, now I think of it, if the fugitive went in that direction, M. de Brannes must have met him.” As the foreigner spoke he pointed his finger towards a clump of trees which hid the Pavillon des Sorbiers.

“I met nobody,” said the captain, “nobody, I came by the high road all the way.”

“Then the scoundrel must have kept to the river bank,” ejaculated M. Wassmann, with perfect composure, “and farther on he no doubt took the train back to Paris.”

"I renounce running after him for the present, but not discovering him eventually, for he has left certain things behind him, which will greatly assist in securing his conviction, when he is captured," said Julien, emphatically accentuating the latter part of his speech.

"I sincerely hope that you will find him," said M. Wassmann, "and I deeply regret that I cannot continue this interesting conversation, but I see a carriage coming this way and recognise the action of the trotters, which I bought only last year from the secretary of the Russian Legation. It is my daughter coming to take me to Paris. So you will excuse me, gentlemen, for leaving you, and I hope you will do me the pleasure of coming some evening to smoke a cigar with me; I have some first-class ones, which a friend of mine, a ship captain, lately brought me from Havannah, and I can offer you some *kummel* also, sent me by our consul at Riga."

"Most willingly," replied Henri de Brannes, although his cousin was nudging him.

"If I had not feared committing an indiscretion," continued the foreigner, "I should long ago have paid my respects at the Château de Chasseneuil; but I request you, captain, to tell your father, that I hope to do so tomorrow."

"My father will feel highly flattered, I am sure," stammered the young officer.

"My daughter, Catherine, would be most happy to make the acquaintance of Mademoiselle de Brannes."

This time the captain hesitated to make a direct reply, for he was by no means too sure of his father's acquiescence in such arrangements, and he knew that Gabrielle was not at all desirous of Mademoiselle Wassmann's society. So he merely bowed while the foreigner turned to Julien and said: "I shall be delighted, Monsieur, to meet you again at Monsieur de Brannes', and trust you will kindly keep me informed respecting the progress of the investigation. I take an interest in the case, and hope that, thanks to you, the culprit will be punished, as he deserves."

La Chanterie reddened with anger, and merely replied with an inarticulate grunt, which M. Wassmann pretended to take for a polite acknowledgement.

However, the Russian trotters had come at such a pace that the carriage, a light and elegant victoria, coloured a pale blue, now drew up near them. Julien's ill humour did not prevent him from glancing at it, and he saw a very charming young woman seated in it, carelessly lounging back among the cushions and shaded by a white parasol. Mademoiselle Wassmann appeared a hundred times prettier to him than he had anticipated. He had expected to see some fresh, chubby, fair-haired fraulein, and he now admired a tall, slender girl, with nut-brown hair, dark gentle eyes, a pale complexion, clear cut regular features, and a wistful expression of face. These charms certainly did not bear comparison with the aristocratic beauty of Gabrielle de Brannes, but Julien felt more inclined to forgive his cousin's intimacy with the father of this foreign marvel.

M. Wassmann had beckoned to a tall footman, seated beside the coachman, and the easel, palette, paint-brushes, canvas, and, in fact, the entire artistic paraphernalia, were quickly and neatly got together, and enclosed in a box seemingly made on purpose to hold them under the seat of the carriage. The owner of all these fine things did not think it necessary to introduce his daughter to the cousins. He merely shook hands with the captain, made a friendly bow to the advocate, and having taken his place beside his daughter,

with a parting "Till we meet again, gentlemen," which Henri was delighted with, and which Julien considered highly impudent, he was soon out of sight. The fascinating Catherine had merely made a slight bow, but her eyes had sparkled through the lace of her parasol, and they were not then turned upon M. de la Chanterie.

The victoria shot out of sight like an arrow, and the cousins remained facing each other and looking somewhat embarrassed. Julien, whose head was full of facts, precedents, arguments, and conjectures, realised he had not had the best of it in his bout with the foreigner. Henri reflected that he had made too forward a move in promising M. Wassmann a warm reception at his father's château, not that he in the least believed in any dark designs on the part of this foreigner, but because he knew that the count had firm preconceived opinions on the question of social intercourse.

Captain Henri de Brannes was indeed a thoughtless madcap kind of fellow, and had he come into the world a century previously, he would have cut a good figure in the military household of King Louis XV., whom more than one of his ancestors had served. He possessed all the requisite physical advantages for shining at such a court as that of France was in the gay eighteenth century: a slim figure, an aristocratic cast of countenance, eyes specially calculated to express the most tender passions and most energetic will, a small hand, arched foot, strength, dexterity, and grace of movement. And, moreover, he possessed all the old time wit and bravery, the former natural and the latter gay, he had escaped that modern failing called "posing for admiration," and he was not at all inclined to be unduly sentimental. Generous, like a real grand *seigneur* of the old school, fond of women, horses, and fighting, this Captain Charming was adored by his comrades, and quoted by his superiors as a most promising officer; but the life of an aide-de-camp was barely suited to him in times of peace, and pending a campaign what would bring him plenty of laurels, he had indulged in any number of follies. The greatest he could now commit would be to marry against his father's will. The count paid all his gambling debts without demur, and shut his eyes to duels and passing love affairs, but he would never forgive a *mésalliance*. Henri had happily not yet come to that; there was nothing tragic about his passion for the German beauty of the Pavillon des Sorbiers; indeed, most hopeful of symptoms, he was still as gay as ever. "I say, Julien," he exclaimed, twirling his long fair moustache. "I bet you never saw a prettier girl than that?"

"Possibly not," retorted Julien, "but I never saw a man I disliked more than her honoured father."

"Pooh! he is only like every German you ever saw. Are you going to maintain that he is a brigand in disguise, as you told him to his face a few minutes ago, or something very like it?"

"If I did so, it was because I had my reasons. You speak of disguises, when you have just seen what I found over yonder in the ditch——"

"A disguise! Do you mean those boots?" asked the captain, pointing with his hunting crop to something floating on the water.

Fools sometimes have keener eyesight than serious people, and Julien had not yet discerned the floating object, which his giddy young cousin had just pointed out to him. This object, which came along gently with the current, grazing the bank, and at times delayed in its course by the rushes, this object, unsuited to navigation, was, indeed, a high leather boot, of the kind known as Hessians. The young lawyer rushed towards this new piece of evidence, with an energy which made Henri de Brannes burst into laughter,

To get hold of it, Julien was obliged to wade in the water up to his knees and splash and bend about in the most laughable fashion. Fortunately, Gabrielle was not there to witness her cavalier bearing everything, even ridicule, in the execution of her orders. The intrepid young fellow was at least well rewarded for his pains. The boot was of yellow supple leather, and to all appearance of foreign make. It was not provided with spurs, but it bore numerous traces of recent and repeated contact with sharp stones, thorny wood, and other sharp cutting substances. It had evidently not been used for riding, but had done duty as a cuirass to protect somebody's leg while hastening along a rough path. Whose leg? One of M. Wassmann's undoubtedly, and this explained the immaculate condition of the patent leather shoes and silk socks, which had completed his get up as an amateur painter. Whilst Julien turned the boot over and over, the captain roared with laughter. "It really is too bad," he said at length, "do you want to collect stray boots and shoes, or play Brasseur's part in the *Vie Parisienne*?"

But Julien paying no attention to jokes, exclaimed—"The other! I must get the other!"

As chance had it the other was not far off. Julien found it sticking in the mud, ten paces above the spot where the painter had fixed his easel. Both boots must have been thrown in the water there, precipitately, and they had afterwards been parted by the current, which had ended by carrying one of them away. M. de la Chanterie came back with his singular trophy, more delighted than if he had carried the head of some giant slain by his own hand, for the sake of Gabrielle's beautiful eyes.

"Come, my fine friend," said Henri de Brannes, "pray tell me what you mean to do with those venerable old kettles!"

"Come on, and I will soon show you," replied Julien gravely. And thereupon he climbed up the bank, crossed the road and jumped down into the ditch bordering the Bélière woods. The captain leading his horse by the bridle followed, and saw his cousin throw the boots upon a bundle of ragged clothes.

"You see these rags?" said Julien, "Well, the boots complete them, the man I pursued through the road wore all this toggery, in order not to be recognised; he undressed here in the ditch in half a second, and took off his boots on the banks of the Marne. Is that clear?"

"As clear as you like. I don't deny that some scoundrel of a poacher, an accomplice of Michel's murderer if you like, let you pursue him to no purpose, but I will never believe that a gentleman several times a millionaire amuses himself by killing my father's keepers and playing Fra Diavolo in the vicinity of Paris."

Julien might have replied to the point, but he quite understood that the charms of Mademoiselle Wassmann would influence Henri sufficiently to prevent him from yielding to evidence, so instead of trying to convince him, he resolved to content himself by getting as much useful information out of him as he possibly could. He was quite decided to act alone, without assistance and without confidant, and he even concluded that it would be prudent not to show the captain the letter which had served the murderer as a gun-wad, and which he now had in his pocket. "My dear Henri," he said, with affected calmness, "I have no more inclination than yourself to accuse Monsieur Wassmann. His daughter is really too pretty to have a scoundrel for a father, only I have a clue which I intend to follow up."

"How the deuce is it that you have such a taste for detective duty? Why not keep quiet, now that the rascally poacher is captured?"

"Because I am perfectly certain he had some accomplices, or one at the least."

"Well, and what does it matter to you? It's the business of the judges, the clerks, and other men of the gown."

"And ours too, more or less, for my uncle is particularly anxious that an example should be made, and I promised him to follow up the case."

"All right, my friend, providing you don't fancy you recognise the guilty party in every person you meet, and above all, providing you don't cast stones at me, that is to say over the walls of the Pavillon des Sorbiers."

"Heaven forbid! but tell me Henri, you are really hard hit then?"

"Never more seriously in my life, my dear fellow. She is pretty enough for any one to be thoroughly in love with her."

"I quite agree with you. She is a marvel of beauty and grace, which latter is the rarer and more valuable of the two. But you are not engaged, I suppose?"

"That depends; what kind of engagement do you mean?"

"I want to know if there is any question of a marriage between yourself and this charming person, if you intend to ask her father for her hand some day, in fact if you are sufficiently smitten with her to wish to marry her?"

The captain before giving a reply, bit the corners of his moustache, and struck his trousers with his riding whip. Evidently enough the question embarrassed him. "Do you know, my dear Julien," he said at last, "you are becoming quite an investigating magistrate? You are growing as precise and as categorical as a clause in the Code. The deuce! do you want me to say just how far I am, as regards Mademoiselle Wassmann, when I don't know myself? Or do you think that at the very beginning of a passion man bothers about what it will end in? The only women you can have ever cared for must have been dressmakers."

It would not have been difficult for La Chanterie to prove that he set his affections higher, but he mistrusted the captain's discretion, and above all he was reluctant to bring Gabrielle's name into this conversation, so he eluded the difficulty by starting on a series of remonstrances, a covert way of gaining his end, which was to obtain some more information respecting M. Wassmann. "I don't ask this out of mere curiosity," he continued, "but because I greatly fear that in the event of your deciding to ask for that young lady's hand in marriage, your father wouldn't care for the alliance."

"It isn't one to be underrated, however, a fellow doesn't find such a rich wife every day."

"That's a point which the Count de Brannes wouldn't take into consideration."

"Anyhow, we have not come to that as yet, and it is quite possible matters may take another turn."

"That would be still worse, but it seems to me things have gone further than you think. Has not M. Wassmann intimated his intention of calling at the Château to-morrow? Hasn't he even proposed that his daughter should call on your sister?"

"Well, what of it. What if he does come to the Château? I see nothing to prevent it."

"I have strong reasons for thinking my uncle and cousin won't be of your opinion in the matter."

"And why?"

"Because like you and me they belong to a circle of society in which people like to be fully informed as to the persons they receive. Come

Henri, tell me frankly, where did you come across this foreigner, and what guarantee do you possess of his honourability?"

"My dear fellow," said the young officer, warmly, "I beg of you to believe I should not associate with Monsieur Wassmann if I were not perfectly well informed respecting him. He has this winter been elected a member of my club, which, as you know, is a select one, and there was not a single black ball against him. Our president obtained the necessary information about him at the Austrian embassy. Wassmann was a major in the Austrian army, in a regiment of cuirassiers, I believe, and he left the service quite recently to manage his fortune. He owns mines in Bohemia, land in Moravia, and capital all over the place. He is a widower with an only daughter, who is charming, as you have just seen. In fine he is a gentleman of old family."

"Really, with this bootmaker's name?"

"What's in a name? You surely don't pretend, Mr. Advocate, that you know the German peerage by heart?"

"No, my dear fellow, and I willingly grant that this foreigner possesses every advantage that you mention, including that of descending from a crusader, still it may not be as easy for you to convince your father and sister, and——"

"Good, I will look out for that, but what the devil are you up to now?"

"I am only picking up all this togger, which I am going to take home as a memento of my man-hunt."

"You are off then?"

"Well, I don't care to put in an appearance at the Château in my present plight, so I shall take the train to Paris and come back here to dinner. Say nothing about all this to my uncle. It's useless."

"Nor to Gabrielle either, eh? don't be alarmed."

"Ah! by-the-bye has M. Wassmann a residence at Paris?"

"Yes, a magnificent mansion, Rue de Presbourg, 44."

"I only ask you that because he can perhaps give me some information I may require at once."

"He will give it you if he can; whatever you choose to think of him, he's really a very worthy fellow," said the captain, who had just remounted his horse, and thereupon he pricked spurs and shouted to his cousin by way of farewell, "Good luck to you, my worthy private detective! Till this evening!"

V.

A WEEK had elapsed since the murder of the gamekeeper and quietude again prevailed in the village, momentarily upset by the shocking tragedy. Poor Michel's fate still formed a subject of conversation at the café of the Grand-Vainqueur, between the games of dominoes, but politics were rapidly reasserting their rights to the foremost place in the discussions. It is true, however, that during the first days which followed upon the murder the frequenters of Mademoiselle Rose's establishment had chattered to their hearts' content about the doings of the legal authorities, exhausting all comments thereon, and carefully sifting every possible conjecture as to the poacher's guilt or innocence. They had, indeed, done all this to such a degree that Mademoiselle Rose, with her sensitive disposition, had undergone terrible suffering; she was, perforce, obliged to hear the dissertations of Verduron,

the jurisconsult concerning the terrible penalty specified for murder by the Penal Code ; and the horrible details of the *post-mortem* as explained, at least ten times consecutively, by the learned Digonnard. In fact, the unfortunate landlady was at length obliged to entreat these gentlemen to have some consideration for her nerves, and to speak less frequently about dissection, the galleys, and the guillotine.

After laughing at what they called her high-strained sentimentality, they ended by acceding to her request, the more readily, perhaps, as their minds were now made up as regards this serious business. The guilt of the poacher was no longer doubted by any one, and there was unanimous praise of the manner in which the sergeant of the gendarmes had conducted the inquiry. The rigid old chemist alone took occasion from the crime to declaim against the game laws which he stigmatised as feudal institutions, and which he accused of inciting the poor to revolt. However, Mademoiselle Rose had not regained her peace of mind. She was falling away visibly, and she complained of frightful dreams at night time. She spoke on the subject warmly to her friend Jacqueline Ledoux, who, herself, had no reason to feel light-hearted. The death of her cousin Michel had been a terrible blow to her. She could not forgive herself for having been too late to save him on that fatal evening, and was ever bewailing the fact that fate had put so many hindrances in her way, and prevented her from warning the unlucky keeper in time. Jacqueline had also further reasons for fretting, for her husband did not seem at all partial to the child from the Foundling Hospital. In his first moment of anger, he had even declared he should take him back to Paris, and he only softened down on his wife formally promising that she would send the little chap to the authorities if, after a month's trial, it was found that he was of no use at his work.

Marcel, however, proved gentle, intelligent, and most willing ; he had begun work by pruning the rose trees and watering the flowers, but he was growing visibly stronger, and he could already dig a little. The village priest came almost every day to see his young protégé ; and he was amazed at the progress he made, and grew more and more attached to him. He, moreover, endeavoured to set the youngster on good terms with old Ledoux. The latter, a good-natured man at heart, had been somewhat spoilt by associating with Vétillet's set, so he had not at first looked very kindly on the visits which M. Jean paid to his house. He prided himself on being a free-thinker, as already stated, and did not like priests ; but M. Jean spoke so simply, and had such an open face, that before long Ledoux gave in.

The curé of Charly did not try to convert his refractory parishioner ; only, as he thoroughly understood gardening, he was capable of giving good advice on all sorts of subjects, and he did not hesitate to do so. Thus it happened that little by little the gardener grew accustomed to M. Jean's visits, and even took pleasure in his conversation ; a change which drew upon him any number of taunts from his friend the chemist. In vain did Digonnard tell the gardener that priests intruded themselves everywhere ; that if you gave them an inch they took an ell : it was all of no use. Old Ledoux invariably replied that there would always be time to close his door upon the curé when the latter tried to abuse his hospitality. Digonnard thereupon insinuated that M. Jean was subsidised by the officials of the Foundling Hospital to advise him—Ledoux—to keep “that wretched offspring of Parisian vice”—it was poor young Marcel whom he alluded to in this pompous phrase. The gardener strictly declared that the charge had not

even the merit of common sense, as the priest lived in very simple style and not at all like a subsidised individual. He even added that to his own knowledge M. Jean imposed the hardest privations on himself so as to render help to the poor, whereupon the chemist exclaimed with indignation that giving alms was encouraging mendicity. To cut a long story short, Digonnard was completely beaten; the gardener continued to receive M. Jean, and indeed under the influence of his advice he began to look more kindly on the poor young foundling.

Such was the state of matters on the Monday of the week following the crime. That morning, the curé of Charly, who, the previous evening had received a summons to appear before the examining magistrate in Paris, came at an early hour to pay a short visit to Marcel, and was agreeably surprised to find Antoine Cormier, the cabinet-maker of the Faubourg St. Antoine, at Ledoux' house. This was not the first time that the priest and Cormier had met since journeying together in the omnibus between the Madeleine and the Bastille, for on the day following Michel's murder, M. Jean had revisited the house in the Rue de Charonne. Having on his own responsibility obtained permission for the poacher's wife to remain at liberty, he had immediately thought of this house as a fit place to settle the poor woman, at the same time recommending her to the care of the Cormiers. The plan was at once carried out. M. Jean was well known in Paris to several rich and pious families, and had only to mention a case of trouble to obtain immediate assistance. Thus within twenty-four hours a respectable lodging was rented and furnished for the poor street singer and her children, on the fifth floor of the house in which the Cormier family resided. In the cabinet-maker and his wife she found new friends, almost relations; and as she knew how to embroider skilfully, she speedily obtained orders for work, thanks to the priest's exertions. She was thus placed in a position to earn her own and her children's living. Before doing more for her the priest was anxious to become more fully acquainted with her past life, and so far he had had no time to question her. On finding Antoine Cormier at the Ledoux' house, he concluded that the cabinet-maker brought news of some kind respecting the poacher's wife, and in this respect he was not mistaken. Cormier, who had just arrived by the first train, was still exchanging words of greeting with Jacqueline and Marcel, when M. Jean entered the house. The cabinet-maker's face lit up with pleasure the moment he saw the worthy priest, whom he approached with both hands outstretched.

"You mustn't be offended at my not having gone straight to your house, your reverence," said he; "I promised my wife and little ones that my first visit should be for this youngster, Marcel."

"And I should like to know why you never brought your wife and little ones with you?" exclaimed Jacqueline.

"Louise can't possibly leave the house just now," replied the cabinet-maker, with a certain sadness of manner, which did not escape the priest.

"Well, I shall expect them on Monday next, that is if you are not too busy just now, and meanwhile you must take some breakfast with us. Pierre hasn't come back from the market yet, but he'll be here in an hour or so, and glad to see you, I'm sure of it."

"Thanks, but I can't stop, Madame Ledoux," said Cormier; "no, I can't possibly stop to-day, as I have a lot of business with a manufacturer in the Faubourg; I only came here this morning to see his reverence; but don't be alarmed, we shall be back before the week's out, for unluckily work doesn't keep us in doors just now."

"Have you anything urgent to tell me, my friend?" asked M. Jean in an undertone.

"Oh! it's only about that poor woman, and it won't take very long; but——"

"If it's anything private I'm going out of the way," interrupted Jacqueline; "I've something to see to in the garden with the lad." And thereupon she carried off Marcel, without waiting for a reply.

"Have you any bad news about that unhappy creature and her children?" the priest now asked Cormier.

"No, no; the children are wonderfully well, and the mother is not ill, for she works night and day, but she particularly wishes to see you at once, and as she dared not write to you, she implored me so urgently to come and see you that I couldn't refuse her."

"It happens well, as business takes me to Paris this very day; but have you any idea what she wishes to say to me?"

"No, not the faintest idea. Still I think it must be in reference to her rascally husband, for she is always thinking and talking about him. It's no use for Louise or myself to argue with her, she tenaciously maintains that he's perfectly innocent; that he has a bad head, but a good heart; that it was great injustice to have sent him to prison, and that if the jury are not unduly influenced he will be acquitted."

"Alas! I greatly fear that she is deceived," murmured M. Jean.

"So do I; but what is one to do? I haven't strength to contradict her; and my wife less than myself; her head is brimful of fancies. Would you believe it, she goes out regularly every morning and every afternoon to stare at the walls of Mazas? She won't confess it, but Louise surprised her two or three times prowling about there. And look here, your reverence, I'll bet that if she wants to speak to you, it's to ask you to obtain permission for her to see her husband in the prison."

"That would be a very difficult business, and I don't even know if it would be desirable, in her excited state of mind——"

At this point the priest was abruptly interrupted by the door being thrown violently open. It was Mademoiselle Rose who came in, Mademoiselle Rose looking agitated, distracted, in fact, even more disturbed and upset than on the memorable evening when M. Wassmann had visited the Café du Grand Vainqueur.

Antoine Coumier had never set eyes on her before, and the priest scarcely knew her, having only seen her once or twice at Jacqueline's house. They were therefore at a loss to understand why she entered the place in this tumultuous fashion, or why she appeared so agitated. The cabinet-maker fancied she was cracked, while M. Jean was of opinion that a fire must have broken out at the Grand Vainqueur, or that a fresh crime had been committed in the village. However, they had no time to question the old maid, for a window of the room, overlooking the garden, was open, and Madame Ledoux, who was busy clearing her rose trees of caterpillars, perceived her neighbour, and at once hastened in-doors. Marcel also saw the landlady, but he merely gave her a glance, and turning round, continued weeding the strawberry beds.

"Good heavens! what's the matter with you, manzelle?" exclaimed good old Jacqueline; "you are as pale as a sheet. Are we going to have a revolution, or is the mayor going to close your establishment?"

"Ah, Madame Ledoux, if it were only that!" gasped the old maid.

"Only that! You give me quite a turn! What is the matter then?"

"Ah, Madame Ledoux! Would you believe it, Piédouche the gendarme has just brought me a paper which summons me before the magistrate about the case."

"What case?"

"The case of the poacher who killed your cousin."

"It can't be true!"

"It is exactly as I tell you, for it is written on the paper, with my name in full."

"Ah, well! After all, that's no reason for you to put yourself into such a state."

"What! no reason! Don't you realise how terrible it is for a poor woman who has done absolutely nothing to reproach herself with, to be called before a magistrate? Ah, just think of it! To be taken before a magistrate after thirty-one years of blameless life!"

Mademoiselle Rose's emotion did not prevent her from subtracting ten years from the sum total of her age, but this emotion was none the less so real and unaffected that M. Jean was amazed by it. "Why, mademoiselle," he said gently, "you are only called as a witness. There is nothing in it which can possibly injure your reputation."

"Ah, sir, but just think of it! you see how nervous I am! I shall never dare to speak, and I feel certain that I shall faint right away instead of replying to the questions."

"But why?" asked M. Jean, who could not help smiling at this display of nerves; "the magistrate who will question you has nothing terrifying about him; I have already seen him twice in his private room, and I assure you that he is a very gentle, good-natured man."

"Ah! I am sure I hope so," gasped the lady in question; "but it's not only that which torments me."

"It seems to me, however, that you have nothing to fear."

"Doubtless; still I can't help asking myself what they want to question me about."

"Well, it is certainly rather peculiar that you should be summoned as a witness; for, as far as I know, you were not present at that terrible business."

"I never stirred from my counter the whole evening; Madame Ledoux and my customers are at hand to prove it."

"And you don't know the prisoner."

"I! God forbid! I know a scamp like that?" exclaimed the old maid, with vehement indignation.

"Then," said M. Jean, "I cannot make it out at all, unless it's something to do with the anonymous letter which Madame Ledoux, I believe, showed you."

"Oh, dear no! for Madame Ledoux is not summoned."

"That's true, I have received no paper," said Jacqueline; "and why *should* I receive one, since I told all I knew to the magistrate when he came to Charly, and his clerk took it all down in writing?"

"And what is still more extraordinary," continued Mademoiselle Rose, "is that all the gentlemen are summoned for to-day also; Monsieur Digonnard, the chemist, Monsieur Vétillet, the mayor's assessor, Monsieur Verduron, Monsieur Cruchot, in fact all my customers."

"A further reason for not troubling yourself, my dear lady," said the priest gaily, "you will appear in good company, and I may even tell you that I shall probably meet you at the same time in the magistrate's office, or anteroom, for I am summoned to appear at two o'clock."

"Like myself and those gentlemen."

"But I have other business to attend to in Paris," replied M. Jean, "and I must start at once if I don't wish to miss my train."

"And I must go with you, your reverence," said Cormier.

Madame Ledoux vainly tried to prevent their departure, but they gave her to understand that the business they had to attend to was too important to admit of any further delay. Marcel embraced his two friends, and then they all took mutual leave.

The station was not far from Ledoux' house, and by walking fast the priest and the cabinet-maker arrived in time for the train, and climbed up to the *impériale*.* The morning was a magnificent one, and it was already very warm. The priest and Cormier were not sorry to choose seats where they would have the benefit of the open air, not to mention the small economy effected by taking second-class tickets, a saving which neither of them were in a position to undervalue. "I really am rather surprised at all these summonses served upon us for exactly the same day and hour," said M. Jean, as the engine commenced puffing. "It is quite probable that something fresh has been found out. God grant it may prove favourable to the poacher."

"Upon my word, sir, I pity the man's wife!" exclaimed Cormier, "but I haven't the least compassion for him."

"It is always right to pity those in trouble, even when they deserve punishment."

"I don't disagree with that; only I can't help thinking that there are many honest mechanics who have toiled all their life without wronging anyone, and who fall into misery and end by starving to death, while a scamp like he is finds any number of people to take his part."

"Much less than they would take your own, I assure you, my dear Cormier," hastily put in M. Jean.

The cabinet-maker was not in the habit of expressing himself so bitterly, and the priest, struck by his change of manner, wished to ascertain the cause of it. "Have you anything on your mind, my friend?" he gently asked. "You seem to me rather bitter and irritated."

"Well! there's good reason for it. There's a heavy bill owing to me and I can't get the money—three thousand five hundred francs for some furniture sent clean out of the country. I can't run after it to get it back!"

"A pecuniary loss isn't a mortal wound, and when a workman has secured a certain degree of comfort like you have, by his toil and good conduct, he is, thank God, for ever assured against utter misery."

"Ah, your reverence, it's easy to see you are not acquainted with life in the Faubourg. Assured against misery! Ah! we can never make sure of that in our trade."

"However, it seems to me——"

"Just wait a minute; shall I tell you how it all happens? I will show you myself how it comes about. You do a good business during a year, or perhaps two years, and you put aside something for bad times while still living pretty comfortably. It's high time then, and you think it will all last for ever. But, slap-bang! one fine morning politics step in, or a commercial crisis comes about, as the bankers say, and then there's nothing doing. Nothing sells. The workman who can get no orders begins loafing and drinking. Those who, like myself, have previously saved up a little money, make the best they can of it, hold up their heads and say, that although luck's down for the present, it won't last long. That state of thing goes on for weeks and months. Then a fellow begins to draw out gradually the little money he has at the bank. It is necessary to break into your capital. You would manage to live

* On the Paris circular railway line and some of the suburban lines the second-class carriages have an upper storey, as it were, known as the *impériale*. This is, usually, merely roofed in and open to the breeze on either side.—TRANS.

a good while on it perhaps, but you want to buy some foreign wood, or oak, or walnut. You find a good bargain and allow yourself to be tempted. Then as soon as you are out of pocket bad luck begins. Notes of hand from your customers come back dishonoured. Say what you like, you must refund the amount. First one comes, then two, then perhaps nine or ten. Then the wholesale wood merchant comes down on you and wants his money; a rich customer, who has vowed to pay you on a certain day, writes that he has bought a pair of horses at six thousand francs, and can't settle your account for another six months; that has happened to me, I assure you. Then you get mad with anger and let things drift; instead of working you take a stroll, meet friends who entice you into *cafés* with them, the habit is soon contracted, and——"

"But *you* will never come to that, my dear Cormier, I'm sure of it."

"No one knows," said the cabinet-maker, gloomily; "but just let me finish my story, it's most curious. Very well, you begin to stupefy yourself with drink, and the little money left in your drawer at home gradually finds its way into the till at the wine shop. When there is none left you begin to pawn your valuables. Your watch goes first, then your wife's necklet, then your silver spoons and forks, if you have any. Once begun, you can't stop, it's like Panurge's sheep. You take all the clothes and linen to your *uncle's*, one garment after the other, shawls, dresses and all; the children sleep on straw and are chilled through every night. Then,—then," continued Cormier, lowering his voice, "one evening, when there's not a crust of bread left in the house, you go out so that you mayn't hear the poor little wretches crying; you have still, perhaps, a few coppers in your pocket, you swallow a big go of beastly brandy, and then you hurry off to a bridge where there's no one passing along, you watch the water flow, and ——"

"Don't finish! my friend, I implore you, don't go on!" exclaimed M. Jean; suicide is always an awful crime, and when a man is the father of a family and goes and kills himself it's pure cowardice."

Antoine Cormier was about to reply, but he had taken some time to sketch this gloomy picture of misery, and the train now drew up at the last station prior to the terminus—a station called Bel-Air. Four or five passengers only were waiting on the platform, and among them stood a woman. "Can I be mistaken?" muttered the cabinet-maker, looking more closely at her. "But no indeed! by Jove, it's she! What the deuce can she have come out here for?"

M. Jean, who did not understand the drift of these exclamations, also began gazing at the few passengers scattered over the platform, and he saw a woman, very simply clothed, climb on to the *impériale* of a carriage just in front of that in which he and Cormier were seated. As this woman ascended the stairway she turned her back towards the priest, so that he had no notion who she was; but as she reached the outside seats a front view of her was obtained, and M. Jean recognized the pale thin face of the poacher's wife. "Well, this is rather odd, certainly," he said to Cormier in an undertone, "and I don't understand any more than you do what motive brings her to this village at the gates of Paris; I don't suppose she comes here to exercise her old calling as a strolling singer."

"Oh, dear no! No fear of that!" said Cormier, "she never played the guitar in the streets for her own pleasure, and now that she can make her living in other ways she is too proud to try it again."

"Then perhaps she knows someone living at Bel-Air?"

"I should be surprised if she did, for she has never spoken of anyone to

either myself or my wife. On the contrary, she has told Louise twenty times that she has n't either a relation or even a single friend in the world."

"And since she has lived in your house have you never heard of her travelling by the Vincennes line?"

"I have never known of her doing so. Each time she goes out she goes towards the station certainly, but that's on the way to the prison, and we always thought she wanted to stare at the building where her husband is confined. However, we can watch where she goes on leaving the train, for she hasn't seen us. There she is, on the outside seats like ourselves, and with no idea that we are ten yards behind her; she can't even stir without our knowing it."

"Heaven forbid that I should watch her secretly," said the priest, warmly; "first of all I have no right to do so, and then it would be too painful for me to discover that she is undeserving of the sympathy I feel for her."

"I should be sorry too, for every one at home likes her, and it already seems as if we had known her for ten years. We should do better to escort her as she leaves the station, and she will, perhaps, tell us where she comes from, without our asking."

"You are right, my friend; besides, we sha'n't have to wait long, for here we are inside Paris."

"So we are, and in front of the prison of Mazas too. Poor woman, it ought to give her a turn to see that place."

The train was, indeed, now passing over the long viaduct which ends on the Place de la Bastille, skirting the prison which is known by the name of a brave colonel who fell at Austerlitz.* From the railway carriages, you look down on the dismal building, the wings of which form, as it were, a kind of expanded fan. The stranger to Paris, on suddenly perceiving a number of large buildings all radiating from a central one, and symmetrically pierced with windows, hidden by latticed wooden shutters, not unnaturally wonders what the peculiar edifice is. He especially asks himself what purpose is served by the little round buildings which rise in the centre of each yard, extending between the six ribs of this stone-cut fan. In geometrical terms you would say a circle inscribed in a triangle. This circle is itself divided into a certain number of triangular compartments, and enclosed all round by a railing, while at the summit it rises into a rotunda. From above you would say a wheel lying flat on the ground, of which the dividing walls form the spokes, and the rotunda part the axle-tree.

These structures are, in point of fact, the prisoners' promenade places. The men come there by turns to spend an hour, as isolated as in their respective cells, for they can neither speak to nor see each other. At furthest they may catch a sound of footsteps grating on the gravel yard. A warder goes his round, outside the railing; while in the centre another gaoler keeps watch in a sort of lofty lantern tower. There is no other recreation than the sight of a bird winging its way through space, or a cloud drifting across the sky. Everything has been carefully guarded against, wisely calculated, so as to ensure entire separation from the living world. The Mikado of Japan, in the depths of his invisible palace, is not better protected against all contact from without than the man condemned to solitary confinement. Only, when the prison was planned, the railway line was not taken into consideration, and it was not fore-

* Vaubert, Brigadier-General, Morland, Colonel of the Chasseurs of the Imperial Guard, Mazas, Colonel of the 14th line, and Bourdon, Colonel of the 11th Dragoons, who all four fell gloriously on the 2nd December, 1805, have given their name to a square, a quay, and two boulevards in the vicinity of the bridge of Austerlitz.

seen that a day would come when excursion trains would pass over the roofs of houses. The result has been that from the Vincennes line you look down on the exercise places—but for a moment, it is true, and in very imperfect fashion ; still you can at least see them. A good glimpse may especially be obtained when you happen to occupy an outside seat, as was the case with the priest, the mechanic, and the poacher's wife.

"That unfortunate fellow is perhaps at this very minute exercising in one of those open-air cages," said M. Jean, sorrowfully, "and has no idea that the poor creature who loves him so is passing by."

"Who knows?" replied Antoine Cormier ; "who knows if she has not made the journey on purpose that he may have an idea that she's near him."

"What a funny fancy!"

"Stop a minute! I don't think I've made half a bad guess. Do you see her rising from her seat; she is standing upright on the ledge of the carriage."

"Good God! she is going to kill herself!"

"No, no, she knows what she's about; just look. Ah! what did I tell you just now? Do you see? Do you see what she is doing?"

"Yes, she's holding a handkerchief in her hand, and shaking it to and fro."

"Gad! that's a signal."

"To which there is no reply; indeed, there never will be a reply."

"How do you know? As we can see the yards, nothing prevents the prisoners there from seeing us, and I thought some one moved in the one over there."

"But it's already a good way off; we have passed another wing, and here comes another yard, exactly like the previous one; how can she tell which yard to look at?"

"She must know well enough, for see—she has folded up her handkerchief again, and resumed her seat."

"Well, at any rate," murmured M. Jean, giving a sigh of relief, "she has at least come to no harm; it terrified me to see her leaning over like that; an archway or a post, and she might have smashed her head to pieces. I shall reproach her with her imprudence, and try to make her understand what madness it is."

"Now you see the reason why she went to Bel-Air," exclaimed Cormier. "I'll make a bet that she goes there every day."

"It really seems incredible, and she must be impelled by a very powerful attachment."

"Oh! whenever some ruffian is concerned, women are always ready to make fools of themselves."

M. Jean was not inclined to dispute this argument, which the workman would not perhaps have brought forward had he been less plagued by worrying personal affairs, for he was very happy in his own home. The priest confined himself to pitying the sad fate of the poacher's wife, driven to such extremities by the misdeeds of an unworthy husband. The conversation now abruptly came to an end, for the train was drawing up in the Paris station. Whilst the engine panted like a blown horse, and the passengers hurried towards the steps leading outside, Antoine Cormier took leave of M. Jean, saying: "Well, your reverence, there's no need for me to say anything more now, Louise is waiting for me at home to settle accounts with a money-lender who is bothering us. Our neighbour wished expressly to see you to-day, for she implored me to go to Charly and bring you back. As we have met her on the way, I have nothing more to do in the matter."

"Perhaps it will be better for me to see her alone, first of all," replied M.

Jean, "but I sha'n't leave Paris this evening without first calling in the Rue de Charonne."

The priest and the cabinet-maker then shook hands and parted. The singer was only a few steps in front of them. M. Jean soon overtook her whilst Cormier slipped away. On seeing M. Jean, she reddened, and seemed rather confused, but she soon collected herself, and warmly thanked her protector for having come. "I was in the train, quite near you," said the priest intentionally.

"You saw me, then?" she asked, growing still redder in the face.

"Yes, and I can't help telling you, that you frightened and distressed me somewhat."

"Why? Is it wrong for me to try to catch a glimpse of him?"

"Wrong! no, not that exactly, but your conduct is rather inconsistent, and I can't help telling you, that it would be wiser for you to employ your time in other ways."

"If it is a fault to rob my children of an hour every day, I make up for it by working at night."

"What! do you mean that you make this journey every day?"

"Yes," said the poor woman sadly, "and he has not yet seen my signal, or at any rate he has not replied to it. But since your reverence has come to my help, I no longer despair."

"What do you want of me?" asked M. Jean, not without a touch of anxiety in his voice.

"I want you to obtain permission for me to have an interview with Robert in the prison."

"If the favour you ask depended merely on myself," said M. Jean, "it would have already been granted you, but I am almost certain it will be refused, at any rate whilst the investigation is in progress."

"Ah! those judges have no pity," murmured the singer.

"You are wrong, madame," replied the priest gently "the magistrate who has charge of this case is, on the contrary, a most good-natured man; he compassionates your sad situation, and he is quite disposed to do what he can; so I hope he will at least grant you leave to write to your husband."

"Not without my letters being read," said the poacher's wife, bitterly.

"Alas! that is a stringent rule, and you must understand that a person charged with a crime cannot be allowed to communicate freely with his friends. It is not desirable that they should concert together so as to evade the law."

"I see that the judges wish to deprive Robert of every means of defending himself, and even of the consolation of seeing those who still take an interest in him."

"Misfortune makes you unjust, and I hope with all my heart that the magistrate will yield to the reasons I shall lay before him."

"You promise me, then, to ask this favour of him?"

"Yes, I promise it; because I think I can answer for it that you will not abuse my trust. On your side, you will promise, I hope, not to make any more foolish attempts——"

"If they allow me to speak to him, I will not recommence; but if they deny me this favour I shall take the train over and over again until he has seen me, until some sign, some gesture, some movement has shown me that he knows I am thinking of him."

"But it's quite senseless! you don't even know in which yard he takes exercise, or at what hour of the day."

"Oh! I know his cell is on the third gallery. So I know where the yard is.

I obtained my information from people who supply things to the prisoners awaiting trial. They told me that Robert took exercise in the morning, and since then I have not missed passing by in the train every day. If you knew with what anguish I await the moment, how my heart beats when the train approaches the prison, how oppressed it feels when I can no longer see the walls. Ah ! I should cease to live if I ceased to hope. Listen ! to-day I noticed among the houses which touch the viaduct a garret window which I fancied must overlook the yard. Ah ! I would give my life for the right of remaining all day at that window."

"You forget that you are a mother," said M. Jean severely.

The poacher's wife trembled, cast down her eyes, and remained silent, big tears coursing down her face the while. This conversation took place on the shady walk edging the canal between the Place de la Bastille and the Seine. The curé of Charly, on leaving the station, had walked in that direction to avoid the crowd and secure a favourable site for quiet conversation. The singer was walking sadly and silently beside him, and they went a hundred steps further or so without exchanging a word. M. Jean thought, however, that it was his duty to recall this poor wanderer to the right path of duty.

"Madame," he said, "I haven't sufficient courage to reproach you with the excess of your devotion. I merely beg of you to think of your children, who have only you to look to in the world. If your manœuvres outside the prison became known to the authorities you would probably be arrested. In any case you would seriously compromise your husband."

"For heaven's sake, sir, obtain permission for me to see him," she murmured in a choking voice.

"Listen to me," replied the priest steadily, "I am, at this very moment, on my way to the Palais de Justice, where I am summoned by the magistrate conducting the inquiry. I am quite willing to ask this favour of him, and I will call his attention to those mysterious features of the case, which seem to be in favour of your husband, and to indicate his innocence. You believe him to be innocent, do you not ?"

"Do I believe him innocent ? Ah, why can't I myself explain Robert's character to the magistrate, tell his life story, show what a strange fellow he is."

"Well, what you might tell the magistrate you can tell to me just as well, it is important that I should share your opinion in pleading your husband's cause. I know but very little of his life, or of your own, and if I inspire you with sufficient confidence——"

"In whom should I trust, if not in you ?" said the singer warmly. "I will tell you everything, without changing or suppressing any particular ; hard as it is for me to recall my sad past life. My name was Eugénie Giraud, and my father was a farmer, we lived in the Brie district, where he cultivated a farm of 1,500 acres. He was rich, and had no other children than myself, my mother had died in giving birth to me ; he sent me to school at Meaux, with the daughters of wealthy townspeople and noblemen, and I received an excellent education."

"I guessed that before you told me so," murmured M. Jean.

"I was sixteen," continued Eugénie, "and was on the point of returning home, when a regiment of hussars came to garrison the town. Robert was a non-commissioned officer in it ; he saw me walking out—he wrote to me—I knew nothing of life, and already—yes, I was already madly in love with him ; I was imprudent enough to reply to his advances ; a month afterwards, I ran away with him."

"Unhappy child!"

"Yes, most unhappy, for, from that sad day my life has been one long torture to me. Robert took me to Paris, and it was only when there that I recognised the gravity of my fault. He soon confessed to me that he was being searched for as a deserter, and threatened with being court-martialed; whereupon I begged him to come with me and implore my father's pardon, and he consented."

"That was a move in the right direction."

"Yes, but perhaps it would have been better for me had I then died in my shame; I should have suffered less. My father adored me; he understood that if I did not marry the man, who had seduced me, I should become a lost woman. He went to see the Colonel of Robert's regiment, and so arranged matters that the desertion business was hushed up, on conditions that the guilty one left the service immediately. The next day Robert was superseded in the regiment, and a fortnight later we were married."

"And settled at your father's house?"

"No, I wished it more than anything, but Robert would not consent. He told me he should be bored to death if he lived at the farm, and he persuaded me that with his activity and intelligence he was certain of making a rapid fortune in Paris. But one thing was wanting to ensure his success, and that my father could easily give him—a small sum of money to commence with."

"It was no doubt speedily spent?"

"In less than three years. I was recovering from my first confinement, when my husband one day told me that we had nothing left us, and that he was being prosecuted for debt."

"His ruin was doubtless due to a disorderly, riotous mode of life?"

"No," said Eugénie warmly, "Robert was victimised by some wretches with whom he had imprudently gone into partnership. The desire of shining in the world had made him rather extravagant perhaps, but he still loved me. To stop the prosecution one hundred thousand francs were needed. The only person I could ask for them was my father. I was worn out by fatigue, overcome with grief; still I left for the farm."

"And your father gave way?"

"He was furious at first; he entreated me to consent to a legal separation which he undertook to obtain; he offered me a home with him for myself and child. But I swore to him that Robert repented his errors, and was ready to work energetically to repair the past; my poor father allowed himself to be moved by my entreaties."

"The man whom you try to excuse was lying, then—lying when he promised you to expiate his fault?"

"No, he was sincere then, but he could not withstand temptations which proved his ruin. Two years later my father died of grief, and the property he left me, although already much entrenched upon, might yet have sufficed to support us comfortably. However, Robert had an inordinate love of luxury, and our ruin was soon complete."

"Do you still assert that he loved you?" sadly asked M. Jean; "do you pretend to excuse him—he, who was not even debarred by the thought of his children from following the fatal path?"

"Yes, he loved me," said Eugénie excitedly, "for he was jealous, and his jealousy alone brought about the final catastrophe which separated us. God knows that his suspicions were unjust! But he was embittered by misfortune; and then there was a man who was his evil genius, a man who drew him into a political plot, and who did not cease inciting him against me by odious

calumny. Robert received an anonymous letter, challenged the man who was denounced to him as a rival, and killed him."

"A murderer once before!" said M. Jean, in a low voice.

"Oh! he killed him in a duel, and the fight was perfectly fair; but on the very day he fought he was denounced as a conspirator by a traitor, and had barely time to abscond to England."

"And you believe in the innocence of a man who, in his anxiety for his own safety, had the cowardice to fly and abandon you?"

"As I told you before, I had been slandered to him, and in his eyes I was guilty. He left me with curses, and only the other evening, when fate caused me to involuntarily denounce him, I read in his eyes that he had never forgiven me."

"A sorry excuse for such hardness of heart, and one which I shall hardly care to urge in his favour. Will you also try to justify the lawless life he has led since his return to France?"

"No, and I realise very well that I have not yet commenced; but I swear to you before God, that although Robert ruined me, although he unjustly hates me, and has lived for many years in a state of revolt against the law, I swear to you by my children's life, that he is incapable of committing a murder.

The poacher's wife articulated this protest with such emphasis, that she made a great impression on M. Jean. "God would never permit a scoundrel to be so loved," he murmured.

"Listen, madame," he continued gently, "appearances are all against your husband, I can't conceal it from you that it is so, and I greatly fear that his past history would injure his cause in the opinion of the magistrates, instead of doing him any good, as you hope; still it shall never be said that I neglected a single chance to save him. As I previously told you, I am summoned before the investigating magistrate to-day, and I will profit by the opportunity to ask him not to hurry matters on. I may as well tell you also, that something fresh may have cropped up, for a number of people who had not yet been heard, are summoned, like myself, for to-day, and it is to be noted further, that none of these people, as far as I know, witnessed either Michel's murder or your husband's arrest; in fact, none of them even know him."

"Oh! heavens, can they have discovered the real criminal?"

"I hardly dare to hope it, but this change in the line of the inquiry is none the less of good augury; at least, so it seems to me. Besides, I shall ascertain the truth, and promise to let you know all about it this very day. As to the permission you so much desire, I will do all I can to obtain it; but don't you fear a bad reception from your husband? If he is still influenced by the remembrance of the slander against you, and if he hasn't forgiven you, what will you obtain by the interview?"

"Nothing! Nothing, except the happiness of seeing him."

"Of seeing him! Alas! you are doubtless not aware to what painful restrictions you must submit, if you are granted your request. I have had occasion to visit people in prison several times, people who had asked for my ministry, and I have to tell you, if you don't already know it, that you will not be alone with your husband for a single moment, that a barred grating will separate you from him."

"Never mind, I shall see him!"

"And supposing he repels you, and has the cruelty to reproach you with the involuntary wrong you did him by putting his pursuers on his track?"

"I will throw myself at his feet, and will pray to him on my bended knees; he is good, generous, he will remember that he once loved me, and he will

abjure his hatred ; and then I will tell him he is not deserted, that you take every interest in him, that we are watching, and that all that can be attempted on his behalf to save him, is being done."

"You will speak to him also of his children, won't you?" asked M. Jean, with great emotion in his voice.

"Yes, yes," said Eugénie, bending her head, "I will remind him that he used to love them dearly. Alas ! he hardly knows the youngest of them, for the misfortune which drove him into exile followed close upon the poor child's birth, and then—he perhaps cursed him—then it was he thought me guilty—but I will speak to him of his first-born, the one whom he saw grow up, and who prays each evening for his father."

"Poor little fellow !" murmured M. Jean. "When he nestled close to his mother, over yonder, beside the Marne, on the occasion of that fatal meeting, his father never held out a hand to him, but looked at him without a tear in his eyes."

"He did not see him," said Eugénie excitedly, "he saw only me, and it was quite natural that he should feel some indignation ; he recognised that it was my fatal thoughtlessness which was his ruin ! Ah ! I deserve to suffer, for had I not spoken, had I not told you that a man had just left the wood, no one would have thought of Robert——"

"You are wrong, and I can assure you, you have nothing to reproach yourself with. Your husband was already suspected, the gendarmes were furnished with a description of him, and he could not have escaped them for long."

Eugénie gave a sigh of despair. She was evidently not inclined to listen to reason on this point, and the priest would only have wasted his time in trying to console her. Besides, it was getting late, and the magistrate must not be kept waiting.

"Madame," said he, "I am obliged to leave you. Pray be patient till this evening. I shan't return to Charly without having told you the result of my attempts. If it does not prove such as you wish for, if you are not authorised to see your husband, at least, I believe that I shall succeed in getting an authorisation for myself personally, and in that event, I will do all I can to serve you both ; will you promise me to do nothing imprudent till my return?"

"I promise not to leave my children till I have seen you," murmured the poor woman, who at length understood the necessity of submitting.

M. Jean spoke a few more words of comfort, and left her with a full heart. During the thirty years of his life spent in comforting the afflicted he had never met with a case which had affected him so deeply as this one. This forsaken mother, whose life had been but one long anguish, and who had yet known how to suffer without complaint ; this tortured wife, who asked nothing better than to devote herself to her executioner, was well deserving of the interest which the priest of Charly evinced in her. In his infinite charity he never questioned whether she were really above reproach, whether God would not condemn so mad an infatuation for so great a criminal. She loved and suffered. That was a sufficient reason for him to exert himself on her behalf. And yet, as he walked along the quay on his way to the Palais de Justice, he could not help thinking that many points needed clearing up in the sad story he had just heard. Athwart the natural reticence, semi-admissions of the woman, he espied various dramatical and conflicting circumstances in which she herself might perhaps have been to blame. Was her husband's jealousy entirely without just cause ? was it allowable to think that his hatred had arisen without reason or proof ? M. Jean was not sufficiently acquainted

with their past life to decide this point, and it went against him to inquire into it too closely. He preferred to reflect upon all the mystery enshrouding this criminal case, which bid fair to become a *cause célèbre*. He had at first refused to believe in Robert's guilt. The anonymous letter addressed to Jacqueline Ledoux seemed especially inexplicable to him, if it were assumed that the murder had been committed by this poacher. A crime occasioned by a fortuitous meeting cannot be pre-announced. However, the priest had been gradually convinced by the inquiry which the sergeant of gendarmes had carried on, and but little doubt of Robert's guilt then remained to him. Still, the summons sent to himself as to the landlady and customers of the Grand Vainqueur gave him food for reflection, and he was tempted to regard it as a favourable omen.

Thus when he reached the Palais de Justice he vaguely hoped that he would learn that something had changed the aspect of the case, and that the poacher's conviction was no longer a foregone conclusion. He had already been to see the magistrate once before, and had no need of anyone to guide him through the labyrinth of passages and yards of the vast pile, where all the judges of France, even those of the revolutionary tribunals, have sat for centuries past. He went straight to the magistrate's office situated at the end of a long passage on the third floor of a block of buildings facing the Sainte Chapelle.

The staircase and the passage were full of animation that morning; advocates hurried about wearing their gowns and carrying large portfolios full of briefs under their arms, flurried witnesses were trying to find their way hither and thither, while some Gardes de Paris led along a poor devil of a prisoner, who held a handkerchief over his mouth and had pulled his hat down over his eyes so as to hide his face from observation.

M. Jean was not in the humour to derive any pleasure from the sight of such a picture. He had just discovered, that he had arrived a long while before the right time, and he contemplated, with some dismay, the prospect of promenading about a place of the kind in his ecclesiastical dress. He indeed felt himself out of place in the midst of all these people who gazed at him with mistrustful surprise, and although he would willingly have entered a murderer's cell to speak with him of God, he felt as if he were almost compromising himself by lingering in the ante-room of the criminal investigation department where no one needed his message of consolation. However, an unexpected meeting relieved him from his embarrassment. On turning the corner of a passage in which he was wandering along somewhat sadly, he found himself face to face with M. Julien de la Chanterie.

The young advocate did not wear his gown; his elegant attire, as well as his shapely figure, and open expression of countenance, contrasted strangely with the negligent garb and scowling expression of most of the people here assembled by legal necessity. He immediately recognised M. Jean, and bowed to him with deferential cordiality. "I have to inform your reverence," he said, after exchanging a formal greeting, "that affairs have taken a fresh turn, which will please you if I am not mistaken, for I think you take an interest in this unfortunate poacher."

"Indeed!" exclaimed M. Jean, "has anything favourable to his cause been discovered?"

"Better than that, your reverence; proof of his innocence, perfect and unquestionable proof."

"Ah, sir, how you delight me! I am the more pleased to hear it as I feared it was impossible to save him. But who has effected this miracle in his favour?"

"I have partly contributed to the result," said Julien smiling, "for it is I who put the examining magistrate on the track of the real criminal."

"The real criminal! What! you are acquainted with him then?" exclaimed M. Jean.

"I am acquainted with him."

"And he is arrested?"

"Not yet, but he will be very shortly—to-day I hope."

"He is within reach of the law, then? He cannot make his escape?"

"He would vainly try to do so, for he is closely watched; but he will be careful to make no attempt, for he still hopes that matters won't go so far. He has been questioned very carefully, in a way not to excite his suspicions, and by way of justification he has made certain assertions, which have yet to be proved. If, as I feel convinced will be the case, they are shown to be false, a warrant for his arrest will be issued at once, and executed this very evening."

"Then this unhappy man in prison will be set at liberty at once. What a joy for his wife!"

"Excuse me, your reverence," said La Chanterie, with a smile, "things will hardly go as fast as you think. There are formalities to be attended to, formalities both numerous and complicated. It will be necessary also to inquire whether the poacher, Robert, may not have been an accomplice, even in a slight degree, of the principal perpetrator of the crime, and even if it is shown that he had nothing to do with the murder, he will still be liable to prosecution in connection with his poaching misdemeanour. In fact, a severe sentence may be passed on him on account of his antecedents, and as a caution to him for having misled justice, albeit involuntarily."

"But he has already been punished, it seems to me, and it would hardly be right to make him pay the penalty of an error for which he himself has suffered."

"I never allow myself to pass judgment on judges," said the young advocate merrily, "and you will agree with me, that Robert ought to be thankful at getting off so easily."

"Had it not been for your help, sir, it was all up with him; and his wife would have simply died of grief. I really don't know how to thank you enough, on her behalf and that of her poor children."

"They don't owe any gratitude to me, I assure you. Someone took up their cause, and ordered me to see them righted. I have had the good fortune to succeed, but I have only executed my orders."

"Which were difficult ones to execute; for all the circumstantial evidence was against Robert, and I can't help wondering how you have succeeded in ascertaining the truth."

"Chance has greatly helped me," said Julien, modestly; "and besides for an entire week I have done nothing else but attend to this affair. Moreover, the real criminal was within easy reach, and once on the track, I had no difficulty in following it up."

"The murderer is a resident of Charly, then?" said M. Jean sadly. "I hoped that in my dear parish no one would be found capable of——"

"Set your mind at rest, your reverence. The murderer does live at Charly, but I doubt whether you consider him a parishioner, and when you are acquainted with his name——"

"Would it be an indiscretion to ask you what it is?"

"Certainly not; and the less so, as you will learn it very shortly in the magistrate's private room. For if I am not mistaken you have been summoned to give evidence on certain facts of the case which this scamp brings forward to justify himself."

"I!" exclaimed M. Jean, amazed. "I summoned to bear witness in his favour! It's impossible. I don't know him; and even if I did know him, I am not aware of anything calculated to exonerate him. To bear witness, you say. What about?"

"As to that, your reverence, it is impossible for me to tell you, for I don't know. The investigating magistrate who heard my statement yesterday gave me to understand that he had summoned several important witnesses for to-day, and you among the number. He also stated that, after questioning them, he would come to a final decision in this matter, and he even desired me to hold myself in readiness this afternoon, in case he required my services. That is what has brought me here, and I am delighted that I came early, since I have had the pleasure of meeting you. I hope that a day so well begun will end well," added Julian de la Chanterie, "and that the poor poacher's family will shower blessings on your head this evening."

"God grant it, sir! I am now quite anxious to see the magistrate."

"I don't fancy you will have to wait long, for we have to deal with a magistrate who prides himself upon his punctuality; and I should not be surprised if he arrived before the time."

"Then," rejoined M. Jean, "you think I shall learn the name of the scoundrel in whose stead an innocent man has almost been condemned? Excuse my reverting to the subject; it is not mere curiosity which impels me, but the interest I take in the poacher's family, which urges me to ask you——"

"The name of Michel's murderer? You remind me I ought to have told it you already; and you will be greatly astonished when I inform you that this scamp is——"

It was no doubt ordained that M. de la Chanterie should not complete his revelation; for just as he was about to give the murderer's name, he stopped short, raised his hand to his hat and bowed most respectfully to a gentleman attired in black from head to foot, who had suddenly appeared in the passage. M. Jean also recognised the new comer, who was indeed the investigating magistrate, and who, after nodding in a friendly way to the young lawyer, approached the priest in a deferential manner. "I thank you, your reverence, for having thought of coming here betimes," he said courteously. "I shall be able to converse all the longer with you, and avail myself of your sagacity to decide a most difficult case."

The priest bowed; he had not expected this kind of reception, and he thought it augured well. "If you will kindly come into my private room," continued the magistrate, "we shall have time to talk matters over before the arrival of my clerk. As to you, my dear sir," he added, turning towards Julien, "I rely on your remaining near at hand; you know I shall want to see you after this business, which will perhaps take up some time; however, I will send for you directly it is over." Thereupon, the magistrate, opening the door of his room, ushered M. Jean inside. The apartment was like all those which serve for all the preliminary skirmishing between prisoners and judges. Naturally enough in this duel, justice has the choice of position and advantage of the light; that is to say the magistrate sits with his back to the light, which shines full in the prisoner's face. It follows, therefore, that in all these rooms the furniture is invariably arranged in the same fashion. A large writing-table with the orthodox armchair, seated with green morocco leather, for the magistrate; close by a less pretentious table and chair for the clerk, and opposite, another chair which serves as a seat for the prisoner or the witness who is being questioned. Further off, close to the wall, there is also a place for the gendarme in attendance who usually takes a nap while seated there.

On this occasion the magistrate, setting official customs aside, courteously rolled forward an armchair for the priest's accommodation made him sit down near him.

He was no longer a magistrate insisting upon obtaining evidence, but a man of the world receiving a venerable priest. "Your reverence," said he politely, "I should not have asked you to leave your charge at Charly-sous-Bois for an entire day had it not been absolutely necessary for me to do so. The matter in hand is naturally the case of Robert Martin."

"I have told all I know about it," M. Jean hastily replied.

"I have not the slightest doubt of that, your reverence. Besides it is not to question you anew, that I have had you summoned here, but rather to ask you for certain information."

"Respecting the poacher's family perhaps? Ah, sir, I take a warm interest in it, and if it were possible for you to grant the request I have to make should feel very grateful. The prisoner's poor wife begs permission to go and see her husband in prison, and I believe that I can answer for her visit having no bad result."

"Just now, and until the investigation is finished, such a visit is out of the question, but it is quite possible that very shortly, perhaps to-morrow, that the authorization you ask for won't be necessary."

"Then the Count de Brannes's nephew was not mistaken just now when he led me to hope that——"

"That I should decide not to proceed against Robert Martin?"

"Yes. Monsieur de la Chanterie gave me to understand that the unfortunate fellow's innocence was fully established.

"Oh! we have not quite got to that. Still it is true that the investigation is taking a new turn; and if certain suspicions prove correct, the prisoner may be set at liberty."

"Monsieur de la Chanterie told me the guilty party was discovered."

"The guilty party! that's going rather too far; however, there are serious presumptions against a man who has certainly never had any connection with the poacher, and whom you yourself know very well."

"I, sir!"

"Yes, you saw him quite recently; in fact the person in question is that rich foreigner who lives at Charly, in a villa called the Pavillon des Sorbiers."

"What! you mean Monsieur Wassmann?" exclaimed the priest, quite astounded.

"Why! yes," said the magistrate, "and I see you are quite as astonished at this accusation as I myself was, when Monsieur de la Chanterie brought it in my presence."

"Well, really, I should never have thought that a man moving in the highest ranks of society ——"

"That is not an absolute reason for his innocence; experience has taught me that a high position and wealth are not by any means guarantees of honesty, however, the foreigner under consideration has always enjoyed an excellent reputation at Charly, at least, so I am assured, and I shall be much obliged if your reverence would give me your opinion on the subject."

"My opinion! I have none; and I have no possibility of having any, for I have barely seen this German more than once or twice."

"I beg your pardon; but a few hours before the murder was committed didn't you see him in a carriage which ran over a child on the Place de la Bastille?"

"Quite so," said M. Jean. "The poor little fellow fell under the horses'

hoofs, and the worthy woman in charge of him lost her head. Happily they both got off with a mere fright."

"You forget to add, that this child owed his life to your brave devotion."

"Oh, sir! I did no more than my duty."

"A perilous duty, and heroically accomplished: but did Monsieur Wassmann do his? What was his attitude after the accident?"

"He perhaps seemed rather more indifferent than one could have expected. I fancy that he did not at first understand the gravity of Marcel's fall. But he ended by being touched, and asked for Madame Ledoux's address."

"This Madame Ledoux is the cousin of the unlucky gamekeeper?"

"Yes, sir; she is the person who received such a strange anonymous warning that same morning. I ought to add that Monsieur Wassmann called on her that same evening to hand her a rather large sum of money to indemnify the little boy for his accident and fright."

"I knew that," replied the magistrate, rather absently; "may I now ask you—not as a magistrate, but privately, and appealing to your sense of honour—may I ask you if, in all truth and conscience, you believe M. Wassmann capable of committing the crime I am instructed to investigate?"

"No, certainly not; to speak the truth, I cannot myself understand what grounds there can be for accusing him. I don't see the least motive, for a deed of the kind on his part. He was probably ignorant of Michel's very existence. So why should he have murdered him?"

The investigating magistrate smiled, and replied with a shake of his head: "You argue, your reverence, according to a judicial axiom which frequently proves true. *Is fait cui profit*—the perpetrator of the crime is he whom the crime has profited, so said the lawyers of the old days, and they were not wrong. But one must not forget that the great motive of criminal actions—interest—is often barely perceptible, especially at the commencement of an investigation. You can't fathom a man's soul at once, nor ascertain everything about his past life. To succeed you must have time, patience, sagacity, and even a little good luck. Like yourself I can't imagine what kind of advantage a German, but lately settled in France, could derive from the murder of Monsieur de Brannes's gamekeeper. Still there is nothing to show that we shan't find out later on, that some connection existed between them—a connection which led to dislike, hatred and vengeance."

M. Jean had listened with all due attention to the magistrate's remarks, but he was none the more convinced of M. Wassmann's guilt. "I am much struck, sir, by the justice of your observations," he said with a little hesitation in his manner; "but may I be allowed to ask if the presumptions against this foreigner are founded on proof positive, on peremptory facts?"

"Well, your reverence, so that you may not have the slightest doubt on the matter, I will acquaint you with the exact position of affairs. You know that there is plenty of circumstantial evidence against Robert Martin the poacher! His presence in the Bèlère woods at the moment of the murder, the two shots fired from his gun, one after the other, the fact that the shot found in the wound was of the same description as that extracted from the body of the pheasant, the gun-wads picked up near the dead body—there is enough in all that to secure his conviction ten times over, without considering his antecedents, which are extremely bad. One point alone is difficult of interpretation, I allude to the anonymous letter. I have, therefore, given a deal of attention to it, and ordered searching inquiries to be made in view of discovering who wrote that compromising warning; but no enlightenment has

resulted from the comparison of the handwriting with that of all the persons who might in any way be connected with the case. I had begun to think, and the contrary is not yet proved to me, that the letter emanated from some creature hidden in the purlieus of Paris, formerly frequented by this man Robert, and I was directing my investigation in that sense, when I received a visit from Monsieur de la Chanterie. This young man is much liked and held in high esteem at the Palais de Justice. He has already shown a deal of ability at the bar, he occupies a good position in society, and he is the nephew of Monsieur de Brannes. For my own part, I have a high opinion of him; I was bound to take the new information he brought me into consideration."

"Has he discovered who wrote that mysterious letter?"

"No. He only declares he possesses a clue to its origin; but he came to inform me of something which had befallen himself, and from which it seemed likely that Monsieur Wassmann was at any rate an accomplice of the murderer. Monsieur de la Chanterie was so precise in his statements, and brought forward such tangible evidence, that I was bound to have the matter cleared up. However, the question was a most delicate one, for, if I acted upon Monsieur de la Chanterie's declaration, a man of position would be charged with murder, owing to a combination of most singular and unforeseen circumstances. I therefore decided to act with the greatest caution, and I began by obtaining secret information respecting the foreigner in question. The information I thus secured is not unfavourable to him, but it is very meagre. M. Wassmann is almost unknown at the Austrian Embassy, although he pretends that he formerly held a high rank in the Austrian army. All that is known about him is that he arrived in France in the spring of 1869 with a passport delivered by the Foreign Office at Vienna, and that his passport simply qualified him as a "landowner." It was evidently useless to make further inquiries in this direction. At his abode in Paris—he occupies a fine suite of rooms in the Rue de Presbourg—we learnt that he led a very free life, and appeared to have nothing to do but amuse himself. He has been elected a member of one of the large Paris clubs—where, between ourselves, they admit rich foreigners much too easily—and he is constantly there. His daughter, however, leads a very retired life, never going into society, and but seldom accompanying M. Wassmann to the theatre or the Bois de Boulogne. At Charly, where he is now spending the summer for the second time, the tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers mainly devotes his time to landscape-painting. He never receives visitors, and his servants, all of whom are Germans, hold but little communication with the villagers. This is all I have been able to ascertain by my inquiries."

"It seems to me," murmured M. Jean, "that your information does not supply anything prejudicial to Monsieur Wassmann."

"Nothing positive. There are, however, certain breaks in the evidence which to say the least are rather peculiar. Nothing is absolutely certain as to Wassmann's past life or nationality. It is not known why he came to live in France, whether he intends to remain here, or what his occupation is. People are well aware that he spends a deal of money, but it is not known where this money comes from. Now, my experience has taught me that a rich foreigner, such as Monsieur Wassmann appears to be, is always perfectly well known at the embassy of the country he belongs to. Embassy chanceries are, in fact, in some respects police departments, where every man of note has his set place in the office pigeon-holes, no matter if he come from St. Petersburg or Lisbon. Now, if Monsieur Wassmann has no apparent notoriety, it is perhaps because he is concealing his real identity."

"In fact," said the worthy priest, who was amazed by such logic, "there is something mysterious——"

"And most suspicious," replied the magistrate; "that is why I did not hesitate to summon Monsieur Wassmann here."

"And did he come?"

"Yesterday, and I talked with him for more than an hour. I say talked, because in the present state of matters there was no question of a formal interrogatory. So far we only go on presumptions, which are certainly serious, though they do not warrant an order for his arrest. I therefore confined myself to summoning Monsieur Wassmann before me, more in view of examining him and studying him than of asking any explanation concerning his life and antecedents. I took good care not to mention Monsieur de la Chanterie's charges against him; still, I told him to his face that he had been denounced to me, and that he was accused of participating in the murder of the gamekeeper."

"How did he take that?"

"With a coolness I could not help admiring, but which was almost too forced. Instead of giving way to indignant protestations, he smiled, and, without resenting the audacity of those who had slandered him in this style, he immediately put forward an irrefutable plea."

"What was that?" said M. Jean, excitedly.

"He simply pleaded an alibi."

"An alibi? Then the accusation falls of itself to the ground."

"Yes, certainly; if it can be proved that Monsieur Wassmann was a long distance from the Bélière woods at the hour when Michel was killed, there will no longer be any grounds for suspecting this foreigner. But allegations are useless; proof is needful. An alibi is a two-edged weapon which may strike the person who uses it. If it were proved to me, for instance, that Monsieur Wassmann has lied in trying to justify himself, I should no longer have the slightest doubt of his guilt, and I should not hesitate to issue a warrant for his arrest this very day. In that case Monsieur de la Chanterie will have been in the right when he spoke to you of the poacher's speedy discharge."

"Will Monsieur Wassmann's assertions be soon verified?"

"Before leaving my room I shall know what to think of the matter, and if the contingency I spoke of occurs, I shall sign the warrant forthwith."

"Then what about the witnesses coming from Charly——"

"They have been summoned by my order, and as soon as I have heard them my mind will be made up. However, I depart from the usual course, for I am not at all sure that their evidence will contradict M. Wassmann's statement; and, besides, this foreigner is, by reason of his social position, worthy of some little consideration. If the alibi is not disputed, it is useless that any trace should remain of the charge which my young friend, Monsieur de Brannes's nephew, has made, perhaps, rather too readily. I therefore intend to question the people from Charly-sous-Bois in a manner which will prevent them from thinking that the tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers is suspected; and I confide the secret object of the interrogatory to you alone. In this way I may have followed the wrong track in my investigations for a moment, but I shall not have caused any prejudice to a man whom I can hardly think guilty."

"I see," said M. Jean, sadly, "that the woman I take an interest in is not as near as I hoped she was to seeing her husband again."

"Who knows? Very frequently an intricate case like this one suddenly changes its aspect. We have to deal with two most singular characters: this

German, who, despite appearances, does not seem to me quite blameless or unimpeachable ; and this poacher, whose manners and language amaze me greatly."

"Is he worthy, in your opinion, of the passionate interest which his unhappy wife takes in his fate?"

"I do not think that he is worthy of it, but I can perfectly understand his having inspired the interest you speak of. He is a man of remarkable intelligence, and appears to have received a thorough education, and he expresses himself readily and well. He is very precise in his replies and bold in his demeanour. I never listened to a more skilful defence than his ; neither have I ever met a prisoner who assumed frankness so ably. He hides nothing of his past career ; he owns that at one time he led a dissolute life, and that he ruined his wife and father-in-law ; still he passes lightly over the old family dissensions like a man of feeling, who does not care to make a display of his private wounds. On the other hand, he does not in the least conceal that he was at one time a conspirator, and he almost boasts of the bohemian existence which he has led for many years, pretending to justify it by certain paradoxical theories on the rights of property. And withal he shows an ill restrained violence, which is always breaking out in his behaviour, belying his assumed composure every minute. Altogether, he appears to me to be a dangerous sort of fellow, who, had he been better guided, would have made a bold companion. This outlaw, this freebooter, certainly had in his composition good stuff for a soldier or a speculator, with enough intelligence and audacity to satisfy every ambition. The point is, has this wild bushman become a murderer ? I don't dare to say so as yet, though I am highly inclined to think that such is the case."

"Don't you think, sir, that if he fired upon Michel it must have been after a quarrel with the gamekeeper, and not a premeditated affair ?" asked M. Jean, who knew already from the poacher's wife that her husband had once killed another man in a duel.

"He appears quite capable, to me, of giving way to one of those fits of anger which lead men to commit crimes, but the evidence so far obtained does not agree with such an hypothesis. Besides, if your reverence likes, you can judge of the man yourself ; I see no reason why you should not visit him at Mazas."

"I should greatly like to do so, for you know, sir, that I am very much interested in the prisoner's family ; his wife will be delighted to hear I have been able to take him some consolation and help."

"I will give you the necessary authorisation this very day. But time is passing and my clerk will be here directly. The witnesses must have already arrived. Before sending for them I want to ask you to confirm certain particulars of your previous statement."

"I am at your service, sir, and pray warn me when you wish me to retire."

"But I wish to ask you to remain here till I have finished, for I think it advisable that you should be present at the interrogatories, which ought to be controlled by your evidence, as you will understand when you have replied to the questions I am about to put to you."

M. Jean bowed and waited, somewhat surprised by this invitation.

"Now, your reverence," began the investigating magistrate, "you have declared it was nine o'clock when you were on the tow-path, with the prisoner's wife, and when you heard the shots fired in the Belière woods?"

Yes, quite so."

Well, in thus stating the time was this an approximate guess of yours, or

on the contrary, do you maintain the precise hour ? When you were questioned on the evening of the crime and on the following day no great importance attached to this point, which has now, however, become a most serious matter. Try to remember a little, and tell me if you are perfectly certain in this respect."

"My recollections are most clear," replied M. Jean, without the least hesitation, "and I can't be mistaken, for this reason : when I heard the report of the gun I had just finished counting the strokes of our church clock. They were nine in number, and the last one was still vibrating when the shot was fired. I remember I said to myself that it was later than I had thought, and that my good old servant must have been long expecting me."

"Then the first shot was fired at nine o'clock exactly ?"

"The first shot. The second one followed after an interval of two minutes at the most."

"Very good. Now, to your knowledge, there was nothing amiss with the clock that day ?"

"No, sir. I may add that it never varies. I have remarked that ever since I came to Charly, and I have been the more struck by the clock's regularity, as that of my former parish went very badly indeed, for it was entrusted to the village locksmith, who regulated it every week."

"So there can be no doubt. The keeper was killed between nine o'clock and two minutes past."

"Just so."

"Now, your reverence, you know the part well enough to judge the various distances pretty well ?"

"In the town itself—yes ; but as for the neighbourhood, I would not be answerable for a mistake."

"This concerns the town itself. What time does it take, according to your calculation, to go from the Bélière woods to the first houses you come to in Charly on the near side to Paris ?"

"There is some little distance, for Charly, as you know, has only a single street, which stretches away indefinitely."

"Do you think it would take, say, half an hour ?"

"Not quite, but very nearly that. I reckon that by walking fast one could cover the distance in from twenty to twenty-five minutes."

"And if one ran ?"

"In a quarter of an hour, at the least."

"And you would be obliged to pass the gate of the Château de Chasseneuil, and follow the Grande Rue of Charly all the way down ?"

"Certainly ; there is no other road."

"I thank your reverence. That's all I wanted to know. If requisite, I will beg you to repeat what you have just told me in my clerk's presence. But if I am not mistaken, here he is."

In fact, a door communicating with the passage was now heard to open, and a moment later a short man of discreet appearance entered the room and walked silently towards the little table appropriated to him.

"Are the witnesses I have summoned here?" asked the magistrate.

"Yes, Monsieur le Juge."

"Then, to begin with, call Mademoiselle Rose Jourdain."

The surname thus given was unfamiliar to M. Jean, but he knew that Mademoiselle Rose, of the Grand Vainqueur, was Jacqueline Ledoux's neighbour, and he remembered well how that very morning in his presence she had showed great distress of mind at the prospect of having to appear

before the magistrate. However, he was at a loss to guess why she had been summoned, or how her evidence could affect the magistrate's decision in reference to M. Wassmann. The worthy old priest was still reflecting on the point when the clerk reappeared escorting the landlady, who appeared to be a prey to lively emotions, and who looked wildly around her. In all probability, the prisoners, who in the times of the old criminal laws were pushed by officers into the hall where the executioner was awaiting to torture them, did not look any more terrified and awe-stricken than Mademoiselle Rose did as the worthy clerk ushered her through the doorway. She had donned for the occasion her most lovely attire, and notably a certain straw hat adorned with various fruits and flowers, which gave her the appearance of a centre-piece at dessert; but her brilliant garb only heightened the pallor of her complexion and the haggard look on her face. Her hair, which she generally combed off her forehead to give herself a youthful appearance, her sandy yellow hair seemed to fall in with her sad thoughts, for it fell in long forlorn curls over her thin face. In one word, she was no longer the queen of the Grand Vainqueur, whom Digonnard, the chemist, was pleased to compare to a Montreuil peach in its maturity, whom Verduron did not despise to ogle sentimentally, and whose praises Cruchot, the "vet.," willingly sang in lines of fourteen syllables. A single morning had sufficed to wither this last rose of summer. In one day she had aged five years.

M. Jean, who hardly ever saw her, and who took no interest in her charms, M. Jean, himself, was struck by her appearance; and he was still more surprised when he saw her roll her eyes wildly around and stagger as if about to fall. The magistrate, who was accustomed to frightened faces among witnesses of the female sex, paid less attention to Mademoiselle Rose, and motioned her to a chair, on which she rather fell than seated herself. After the preliminary questions as to her identity, questions which the old maid answered in an unsteady voice, especially when asked to state her age; the magistrate began the examination in due earnest. "You knew of the murder of Monsieur de Brannes's keeper almost as soon as it had taken place?" he asked, looking Mademoiselle Rose full in the face.

"Yes—yes, sir," stammered the trembling spinster.

"How did you hear of it?"

"From my neighbour, Madame Ledoux, who heard the news in the street, and came rushing into the café, crying out. I was, in fact, very frightened."

"Did you go out that evening?"

"No, sir; I did not leave my establishment for a minute."

"Then you saw everyone who entered your house, from sunset till the time you shut up?"

"Yes, sir; very few people came in, however, for the news had upset the whole place, and——"

"You must remember the names of those persons, since they were so few in number."

"Certainly, sir. First of all, there was Madame Ledoux, who came twice—first of all just as night was coming on, and I was getting ready to light my lamps—she had just arrived from Paris, and only remained for a moment; but later on, much later, she burst into the place like a bombshell."

"To give you the news of the murder. You told me that just now. Now, tell me who were the other visitors."

"Why—the gentlemen came as usual to make up a game—gentlemen of good position—Monsieur Vétillet, the mayor's assessor, Monsieur Cruchot, Monsieur Verduron, Monsieur Digonnard——"

Whilst Mademoiselle Rose thus enumerated the celebrities of Charly, the investigating magistrate looked at a list before him, and compared the names in it with those she gave.

"Are those the only ones?" he asked, looking up at the old maid.

"No, sir," said she, fidgetting on her chair; "I saw one other person—a person who does not usually visit the café—the German gentleman who lives at the Pavillon des Sorbiers."

"Monsieur Wassmann, you mean?"

"Yes, sir; I think that is his name."

"You are not acquainted with him, then?"

"Well—no, sir."

"Had you never seen him before that evening?"

"No; that's to say, I had seen him pass along the road in his carriage."

"Very good. But he had never called at your house before the day of the murder. What did he come for?"

"I don't know," muttered the old maid.

"What! You don't know. He must surely have told you why."

"Yes, yes; I remember now. Excuse me, sir, I am not accustomed to be questioned, and I lose my head. The gentleman came about the foundling child that Madame Ledoux brought back from Paris. He brought him some money on account of the accident."

"Caused by his carriage on the Place de la Bastille. I had the official report under my notice."

The magistrate paused, and appeared for a moment absorbed in the examination of some papers. M. Jean, who was greatly interested in the inquiry, did not take his eyes off Mademoiselle Rose, and could not understand her embarrassment.

"Now," continued the magistrate, "can you tell me what exact time it was when Monsieur Wassmann entered your café?"

"A few minutes to nine, sir," replied the landlady of the Grand Vainqueur without the least hesitation.

"You are quite sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure, sir. Madame Ledoux was not there when he arrived, so he waited almost a quarter of an hour for her, chatting with me and the little boy, and then he pulled out his watch and said he was obliged to leave, as it was just nine o'clock."

"Then your certainty is merely founded on the circumstance of his consulting his watch?"

"Excuse me, sir; I looked up at my clock, which showed the time to be five minutes past nine."

"And your clock goes well?"

"Very well, except that it is apt to gain a trifle; but it does not vary ten minutes in a week."

M. Jean now began to understand the drift of these questions, and became more attentive than ever.

"Were the residents of Charly whom you just named present at your conversation with Monsieur Wassmann?" asked the magistrate.

"Yes, sir; they arrived before him, and left after he did."

"Do you think they will remember the circumstance of his looking at his watch to see the time?"

"Well, sir, I couldn't say. Perhaps they paid no attention to it. I rather fancy, however——"

"We shall soon see," said the magistrate, and he leant towards his clerk

who rose up, went out quietly and speedily came back, bringing M. Digonnard with him.

Unlike Mademoiselle Rose, who had entered the magistrate's sanctuary shaking all over, the chemist came in almost triumphantly. He had an indefinable air, an air which expressed both his legitimate satisfaction at the thought of his momentary importance, and the cool dignity of a man determined to have a bout with the authorities. His ruddy face, usually good-natured in expression, wore an almost heroic look, which clearly signified: "I am a witness, whose evidence will be decisive, and whom no one will be able to influence."

As a matter of course, after at first believing, like all his fellow townsmen, in Robert's guilt, he had gradually begun to sympathise with this bold poacher, who made a stand in his own fashion. Digonnard's good nature would not have gone so far as to let the prisoner have a bit of sticking plaster on credit, but it urged him to uphold him in the eyes of the law, and but little more was wanting to make him assert that the late keeper Michel, the vile servant of a count, had killed himself, so as to bring trouble upon poor folks. In point of fact there were two men in Digonnard; first, the tradesman anxious to become rich, and above all desirous of never risking a copper; secondly, the free citizen, whose most sacred duty is to resist the government, and who thinks he has been selected to give it a lesson. A magistrate appointed and paid by government could only be an enemy to Digonnard, who was an elector, eligible to be selected as a deputy and duly licensed as a chemist, this latter point being of far less importance in his eyes than the two former ones.

And then there was a poacher in the case, that is to say, an independent fellow, who laughs at laws, infringes landlords' rights just sufficiently to acquire popularity, without disgracing himself in the eyes of a respectable tradesman accustomed to make two hundred per cent. profit on chemical produce. Digonnard therefore appeared with the deliberate intention of bearing witness in favour of the prisoner; and the presence of the priest of Charly only served to encourage him in his determination to resist the suggestions of a magistrate whom he pronounced beforehand to be prejudiced.

Judging by the chemist's solemn demeanour, you would have said he was preparing to reply before the court of the Inquisition, and indeed it was with all the dignity of Galileo appearing before the judges that he condescended to take a seat. Great was his deception when he heard himself simply questioned as to whether on the evening of the crime he had seen M. Wassmann at the Café du Grand Vainqueur, and at what time that foreigner had arrived there. The chemist was not a man to commit perjury, and he had an excellent memory; so he was obliged to answer, as Mademoiselle Rose had done, that M. Wassmann had come in at about ten minutes to nine, and had left soon after nine had struck.

M. Jean then realised the situation and hung down his head in sorrow. The hope of saving poor Eugénie's husband faded away in presence of this evidence, which clearly established M. Wassmann's alibi. After Mademoiselle Rose's categorical reply the magistrate made up his mind, and he did not consider it necessary to question the customers of the Grand Vainqueur at any length. Each of the domino players came in turn and vouched for M. Wassmann's presence in the café at the time when Michel was being murdered in the Bélière woods. M. Vétillet, who was always afraid of compromising himself, answered rather guardedly. He stated that as his watch had stopped, he had not been able to consult it; but he ended by admitting that within a margin of ten minutes or so the reckoning of the other witnesses was correct.

When the magistrate inquired how long an interval had elapsed between M.

Wassmann's departure and the closing of the café, the domino players replied in a less peremptory fashion. They agreed in saying that Jacqueline Ledoux's noisy arrival and screams about the fatal event had upset their party and made them leave the Grand Vainqueur. They had each of them hurried off in search of fresh news, and had employed the remainder of the evening in going from house to house discussing the terrible business, which would fill all the Paris newspapers, and bring the little township of Charly-sous-Bois into notoriety. However, not one of them had troubled as to what time it might be by the church clock or that of the municipal offices when the catastrophe was discovered. As to Mademoiselle Rose, who had visibly recovered from her emotion, she declared without the least embarrassment that, terrified and thoroughly upset by Madame Ledoux's story, she had hurriedly got rid of her neighbours and Marcel, so as to close her establishment as quickly as possible and retire to rest much earlier than usual.

This explanation was certainly a most natural one and the magistrate did not dwell upon it. He looked at M. Jean as if he wished the priest to say what he thought of this unanimous evidence, and he read on his saddened face the conviction that the poacher was guilty. The case now seemed ended, and he thought he might let Mademoiselle Rose and her customers retire.

The old maid rose to leave with evident satisfaction and the celebrities of Charly did not require pressing to take their departure. Digonnard alone felt a wish to distinguish himself, and prove to the magistrate that a man of his importance was not to be inconvenienced unnecessarily. "Sir," said he, in a pompous tone, "I have failed to understand the object of the examination which I and my honourable companions have just undergone; but as it concerns the millionaire Wassmann, it is my right and duty to tell you that I have no confidence in that wealthy foreigner."

"That is a personal statement which seems to me quite uncalled for," coldly replied the magistrate, amazed at the chemist's impudence.

"All the same, sir," retorted Digonnard bridling up, "it seems to me that in my position of a French citizen, enjoying civil and political rights, it is quite allowable for me to enlighten justice."

"But I don't see how your opinion can enlighten it."

"My opinion rests on certain facts."

"If that fact is not connected with the investigation I am engaged on there is no need for you to apprise me of it."

"This fact is of the greatest gravity, for it proves that this rich fellow of the Pavillon des Sorhiers leads a most suspicious and underhand life in Paris. This man who tries to crush the poor folks of Charly with his luxury, why I met him, I, who speak to you, in the neighbourhood of the Palais-Royal,—met him dressed as a simple servant."

The magistrate reflected for an instant, "Is that all you have to tell me, sir?"

"But I think it is quite enough, and I——"

"Very well, sir, I will make a note of your declaration, and will think it over;" said the magistrate in a tone that admitted of no dispute.

At the same time he made a sign to his clerk, to show the witnesses to the door of his room, and Digonnard, baffled, despite all his self assurance, decided to follow his friends, but not without silently cursing the arrogance of the alaried officers of the law.

"Well?" asked the magistrate of M. Jean, as soon as the door had closed on the bigwigs of Charly.

"Well!" sighed the worthy priest. "I am greatly afraid that Monsieur

Wassmann has been slandered. It is evident that he could not have been at the same time both in the café, and in the Bélière woods, and as he was at Mademoiselle Rose's at nine o'clock, his innocence is clearly established. And, yet, I can't help entertaining some doubts as to his manner of life; this disguise that the chemist just informed you of is a very peculiar thing."

"Yes, if it were certain. But this witness hardly seems to me to be a trustworthy man, and besides he may have made a mistake. And then, even if it were proved that Monsieur Wassmann does disguise himself as a servant, the circumstance would agree pretty well with the information furnished me by the Austrian embassy, but it would in no wise help us to clear up the mystery attached to this murder. I can no longer hide from you that, as matters stand, I shall cease prosecuting the case as regards this foreigner. Of course the police will still continue to watch his movements at Paris, and an effort will be made to obtain further information about him from our ambassador at Vienna; but for the present the investigation is at an end as far as he is concerned."

"And that unfortunate man, Robert, is lost," said M. Jean, sadly. "The hopes with which Monsieur de la Chanterie inspired me have vanished."

"You remind me, your reverence, that I must see that young fellow. He has ventured far too lightly on an enterprise, which, should he persevere in it, might greatly injure his reputation at the Palais de Justice, and I must immediately advise him to abandon all proceedings. I shan't want you anymore to-day," added the magistrate, turning towards his clerk, who hastened to set his papers in order; "as you go out, just tell Monsieur de la Chanterie that I want him. I am certain he is walking about somewhere in the passage, he is so impatient to learn the result of my interview with the witness."

"And he will be terribly disappointed," murmured the curé of Charly; "he reckoned so much on a good result for the poor woman he is interested in, like I am myself."

"Now I think of it," said the magistrate, "can you tell what makes him sympathize so much with a man, who, if he did not murder the keeper, at least massacred Monsieur de Brannes's pheasants? Has the poacher's wife anything to do with it?"

"No, certainly not," said M. Jean, who could not help blushing a little at the idea. "She is quite incapable of inspiring anybody with a passion, still more of sharing one. And, indeed, Monsieur de la Chanterie hardly saw her on that fatal evening, when we met on the banks of the Marne."

"You are quite right, your reverence," said the magistrate smiling, "the idea is perfectly inadmissible. I gave way to an old professional hobby. You know the dictum. 'Look for the woman——'"

"But I am not so sure that it is inapplicable in the present case. Monsieur de la Chanterie's cousin, Mademoiselle de Brannes, takes a great interest in this unhappy family. I even believe, that out of pity for the poor mother and children, she is desirous of seeing Robert set at liberty; and it is quite possible that her wishes have been interpreted as orders by Monsieur Julien."

"Ah! Yes! There is a cousin in the case. How did that escape me? La Chanterie is working the case to please her, and I am greatly afraid that his zeal and his efforts will not be rewarded with success. But I think I hear him. I will try at any rate not to dishearten him too much."

The door softly opened, and the young advocate entered. He appeared agitated, and you could read a question in his glance. The magistrate, who guessed its purport had no wish to prolong the young fellow's suspense. "My dear friend," he said, as he held out his hand to Julien, "I am very sorry to tell you that we have been beaten by Monsieur Wassmann."

"What!" exclaimed Julien.

"Ah! such is the case. He told me the truth yesterday. The five witnesses, whom I have just questioned, did not vary in their evidence, and they maintain that Monsieur Wassmann entered the café shortly before nine, and left it a few minutes after the hour struck. His reverence, moreover, is certain that nine o'clock struck at the church clock at the moment when the shots were fired in the wood, which is more than a thousand yards from the café. The *alibi* is therefore fully established."

"Impossible. There is treachery somewhere," murmured Gabrielle's cousin.

"Be careful that you don't accuse all those good people of perjury."

"If they don't lie, they are mistaken."

"All five? Its unlikely; you must confess it, my dear La Chanterie. Besides the woman who keeps the café, has an exact recollection of the circumstances. She looked up at her clock at the very moment when Monsieur Wassmann drew out his watch before leaving."

"This woman is, no doubt, the one I saw in the passage, in that absurd get up; I was struck by her embarrassed manner, and her agitation; you would have taken her for an accused party, rather than a witness."

"You exaggerate. She appeared to me rather frightened, but nothing more. After all, my friend, I can only say that you mustn't deceive yourself as to the result which would follow any charge against Monsieur Wassmann. After what I have heard, I am bound to stop my inquiry, and I should fail in my duty, if I based a criminal prosecution on presumptions set at naught by a positive fact. I must, for the present at least, decline to proceed against Monsieur Wassmann."

"And if I were to bring you fresh proofs?" asked Julien, warmly.

"If you were to bring me fresh proofs," answered the magistrate, "I should weigh them carefully, and act according to my conscience. But frankly, and between ourselves, my dear friend, have you got any? Do you hope to discover any? Or rather, are you not rather giving way to a preconceived opinion, to the very natural wish to do a good action, by saving the husband of that poor woman, whose misfortunes interest somebody connected with you? It is a good deed to protect the innocent, but you know, as well as I do, how seldom it is that one finds an innocent man among prisoners. And, besides, nobody must be accused lightly."

"Heaven forbid, sir," exclaimed Julien; "I swear to you I should never have brought into this business a man who is almost unknown to me, were I not deeply convinced that it was this man who perpetrated the crime."

"I don't doubt it; but though I have a high opinion of your convictions, you know very well that to issue a warrant against Monsieur Wassmann, I need something more. You are an advocate, my dear La Chanterie, you are young, enthusiastic, perhaps a little in love; I am an investigating magistrate, bound, consequently, to act with circumspection and impartiality, and inclined, by reason of my age, to look at things calmly. In these criminal cases, I can only take facts and evidence into consideration, and they all point towards the poacher. How can you expect me to accuse another man on your simple declaration? You gave me to understand just now that you had gathered other evidence. Let me hear it, and if it be of consequence, I promise you to utilise it and follow it up energetically."

Julien de la Chanterie opened his mouth to reply, and raised his hand to take his pocket-book from his coat, but not a word came from his parted lips; and his hand suddenly stopped short. He was in a terrible state of perplexity. He had the torn letter about him, that precious fragment, which might, per

haps explain the keeper's murder, and which he had not yet mentioned to the magistrate. Now was the moment or never, to produce his "find" and to draw from its examination all the conclusions that could be adduced in Robert's favour; but the reasons that had prevented his doing so in the first instance still existed. After making this singular discovery, Julien had felt that it was better for him to keep it to himself, than to inform the magistrate about it. This course was not, perhaps, quite regular, but it seemed to Julien to be the safer one, in the sense that he expected to arrive at a better result by personally conducting the investigation, with all possible secrecy and expedition, than by relying on an official inquiry, which might be rather negligently prosecuted. One circumstance had especially induced him to take this resolution. The handwriting of the torn letter was exactly the same as that of the anonymous note sent to Jacqueline Ledoux, and the latter had from the outset been placed in the magistrate's hands. Justice was thus provided with a document which furnished a ready basis for investigation; and M. de la Chanterie hardly impeded the action of the authorities by retaining this fragment which, materially speaking, was but the duplicate of the first missive since it was written by the same hand. Now the authorities had been inquiring into the origin of the anonymous letter for a whole week, and had not yet obtained any clue as to the writer. Evidently enough they would not have done any better with the torn fragment; and so, to discover the author of all this correspondence, it was better that there should be two separate inquiries which might be blended together whenever one or the other seemed likely to yield a result. Such had been Julien's opinion, and such it still remained; nevertheless, at the magistrate's question, he was for a moment tempted to reply by producing his curious paper, the wad still soiled by contact with the shot in the murderer's gun. However, reflection prevented him from yielding to his impulse. It occurred to him that, as M. Wassmann had more or less perfectly established his *alibi*, the magistrate would still decline to proceed, even if he possessed both letters. So what was the use of giving him the fragment, which he, Julien, hoped to turn to such good account? So far he had certainly learnt no more than he knew on the first day; but that was not a reason why he should be discouraged, for he had as yet not had the time or the opportunity to carry his investigations very far.

Accordingly the young advocate hung his head and remained silent. The magistrate concluded from this that he considered himself beaten, and he thought the moment a favourable one to point out on what a slight basis his charge against M. Wassmann reposed. He was not sorry, moreover, to lecture him a little at the same time. "So you see, my dear La Chanterie," he said in a patronising manner, "you found your suppositions merely on the curious adventure you met with on the day after the crime in the Bélière woods."

"Isn't that enough?" asked Julien.

"No, certainly not; if you reflect calmly, you will agree with me that the facts on which you reckoned are very far from conclusive."

"However, it seems to me"—

"What? Because you thought you heard a man rambling about near the spot where the gamekeeper was killed; because, after vainly pursuing this man through the wood, you found a blouse in a ditch and a pair of boots in the river, you conclude that Monsieur Wassmann, who happened to be near by, was merely pretending to paint, and that he had just performed a marvellous bit of jugglery. Confess, my friend, that an accusation based on such insignificant circumstances could never be presented to any jury."

"That is quite true," said the young advocate hastily; "but I quite reckoned

that these circumstances would constitute a starting-point for a conscientious inquiry, and——”

“Take care,” interrupted the magistrate smiling; “you are going to tax me with partiality or thoughtlessness.”

“Heaven forbid, sir; and I am ready to confess that everything conspires against me in this case, but my conviction remains unchanged. If I were the magistrate I believe I should act exactly as you do. But to me, a simple lawyer, it is allowable——”

“To try and prove the poacher’s innocence? Yes, certainly, my dear fellow; and I should be delighted to see you succeed, for such a success would win you a great legal reputation; and, by the way, if you were inclined to undertake his defence at the Assizes, that might be easily arranged, for the wretched fellow is not in a position to choose his own advocate.”

“I am much obliged to you, sir; but it would not quite do for me to undertake the defence of a fellow charged with murdering a man connected with my uncle’s household.”

“Ah, just so! I did not think of that. Then you decline——”

“To conduct his defence before the jury—yes; but not to collect all the materials for his defence.”

“I see no reason to prevent your doing that, provided you act with all the prudence necessary in investigations of so delicate a nature. I hope also you will keep me informed as to the results of your counter-inquiry. Rest assured I will immediately act upon it, if you provide me with the necessary proofs.”

“I shall not fail to apply to you,” replied Julien evasively. “May I ask you if you think that the investigation will last much longer?”

“I don’t think so. Unless something unforeseen occurs I reckon that I shall have finished with the case by the end of July; but the hearing will probably be deferred until the Assizes, in the first fortnight of September.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Julien. “I see that I have two months left me to complete my investigations, and now I have to apologise for having made you lose so much valuable time.”

“An examining magistrate never loses his time when he is trying to enlighten the course of justice.” And the magistrate added, turning to M. Jean, and holding out a paper on which he had just written a few words:—“Here, your reverence, is the authorization you asked me for to visit the prisoner Robert Martin. Later, on perhaps, I shall be able to sign one for his wife.”

M. Jean warmly expressed his gratitude, and he and Julien, who seemed but little pleased with the interview, then took leave of the good-natured magistrate. They went out together and walked down the long passage where they had previously met. Both had been grievously undeceived, and the curé of Charly saw that M. de la Chanterie looked so sad and preoccupied that he hardly dared speak to him. It was the young advocate who first broke the embarrassing silence.

“Your reverence,” said he, in a voice full of emotion, “when you again see the poor woman you have taken under your protection, pray tell her to be patient and hopeful, for I have great hopes that some day, and perhaps very soon, I shall be able to prove her husband’s innocence.”

“What!” exclaimed M. Jean. “You still believe in an acquittal, after the evidence that has just been given, and that of the landlady of the café in particular?”

“That woman lies, your reverence; and with God’s help I will unmask her imposture,” said Julien resolutely.

They had reached the outside gate of the Palais de Justice, and they there separated. Whilst M. Jean sadly wended his way to the Rue de Charonne, whither he carried such mournful tidings, Julien de la Chanterie, on his way to his own rooms, muttered beneath his breath. "What a good job I did not give up that torn letter ! It is my only remaining weapon in the duel I am about to fight with Monsieur Wassmann."

VI.

ANOTHER week passed away without any change occurring in the position of the various characters of this story, though much had happened as regarded France itself. Robert was still in prison, his patrons still continued to take a lively interest in his fate, and M. Wassmann, more brilliant than ever, still dazzled the residents of Charly with his magnificence ; but, on the other hand, a thunder-bolt had fallen upon the empire.

The Duke de Gramont, then Minister for Foreign Affairs, had read to the Corps Législatif* that famous declaration which was about to cost France so dear. Roughly awakened from dreamy quietude, the nation which had fallen asleep in peace awoke to war. A few sonorous words had sufficed to make the Paris citizens feel the old warlike blood of the Gauls boiling in their veins.

On leaving the theatre, where "Général Boum" was derided, these people, who had a greater liking for glory than logic, suddenly remembered that their fathers had conquered Europe, and dreamt of victories and conquests, just as on the previous evening they had dreamt of premiums and dividends. However, they still speculated, and even madly ; they still frequented Mabilbe, but they purchased maps of Germany, and pins tipped with tricolour flags, with which they marked out in advance the direct road to Berlin. A warlike breeze had suddenly sprung up, and spread all around, turning every one's head from the Channel to the Pyrenees ; and from the ocean to the Rhine triumphant songs already filled the air ; official poets were already occupied in repolishing old rhymes to *glory* and *laurels* ; while the cannon of the Invalides, which since the days of Solferino had not thundered forth their triumphant salute, were being duly furbished. Only a few sad reasoners argued against the general enthusiasm, and Julien de la Chanterie among the number. Not that he was pretentious enough to assert that "we were unprepared," as a well-known orator now announced at the tribune, just as he had previously declared "that France was formidable." In fact, Julien did not meddle with politics, and had never thought of counting the number of cannon in the arsenals, or the number of soldiers in the regiments. Lovers willingly leave such matters to the petty statesmen who undertake to save empires so as to win titles to govern them later on. Still less did M. de Brannes's nephew belong to the set of dandies among whom it was the fashion to deride patriotism, and who, while supping at the Café Anglais, sneered at the young sub-lieutenants so eager to be shot at for a hundred and fifty francs a month. Neither did he believe in the fraternity of nations, nor did he give way to blubbering declamations against war, such as are generally inspired by the ranters' fear for their own skins. He was, in fact, quite willing to fight and defend his country like his ancestors had done before him, like the brave sons of the soil, workmen and

* July 6, 1870.—When the accession of the Prince of Hohenzollern to the Spanish throne was brought under discussion.—*Trans.*

mechanics, who are always willing to face death, whilst ambitious men talk, idlers amuse themselves, and Utopists lament. But Julien truly loved France, and he could not see her rush into such a perilous enterprise without feeling sad and sick at heart.

It chanced, Frenchman as he was, that he was well acquainted with geography, and did not agree in the belief that beyond the frontier there merely existed some nations quite unworthy of consideration. By a still greater chance he was master of two or three foreign languages, and was, consequently, able to read the newspapers from the other side of the Channel and beyond the Rhine. He had learned from them a great deal which the French press ignored; for instance, that Prussia had become a military power of the first rank, and that Europe, tired of French boasts and turbulence, still feared the Empire, but asked for nothing better than to be freed of all cause for doing so. The young advocate was thus much better posted on these matters than the rulers of the country or the opposition of the time; and thus the future inspired him with grievous apprehensions. Moreover, he was growing very anxious as the outcome of the task which Mademoiselle de Brannes had imposed upon him, a task which was becoming more and more arduous, and which he almost despaired of accomplishing satisfactorily. The *alibi* pleaded by M. Wassmann, and thoroughly proved by the evidence of Mademoiselle Rose and her customers; this indisputable *alibi* had completely changed the magistrate's views. The inquiry was now only prosecuted against the poacher, and if it did not progress very fast, it was, at least, certain that it would not be again diverted into another channel. The case might progress slowly, but, nevertheless, surely, until the Assizes came on. Julien had but himself to depend upon in his attempt to save the poacher, baffle the cunning of the real criminal, and send him to Mazas in place of the present prisoner. This represented a deal of work, certainly, but Julien was sustained by his ardent desire to please an adorable young girl, and with that desire, and a settled conviction of the justice of his cause, he would, indeed, have moved mountains.

He now began by obtaining information in all directions respecting the personage of very doubtful character whom he had such good reasons to suspect. At Charly he learnt no more than he already knew, and he failed to meet the tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers on any one occasion. M. Wassmann had either feared that the Count de Brannes would not give him a cordial reception, or else, for some other reason, he had changed his mind, and had failed to call at the château, as he had announced his intention of doing both to Henri and Julien. The poacher's supporter, on his side, took good care not to accept the invitation tendered to him and his cousin, on the banks of the Marne, to go and drink some kummel and smoke a cigar with a man whom he accused of murder. He was obliged, therefore, to content himself with such chance information as he could pick up; and it was difficult for him to obtain any, for he had never gone among the people of the place, who, consequently, considered him a haughty fellow and mistrusted him. Thus, he could only confer upon the matter with M. Jean, Jacqueline Ledoux, and his uncle's servants, who were not particularly well posted. Jacqueline, indeed, warmly took M. Wassmann's part, for she considered him to be the most generous of men, since he had made Marcel a present of twenty-five louis. Moreover, she did not hesitate to answer for Mademoiselle Rose, whom Julien had at first suspected of perjury. She said so much in praise of the old maid, and the priest supported her so well in her statements, that Julien finished by half believing in the *alibi* himself, without, however, holding M. Wassmann to be altogether innocent. The idea occurred to him that the foreigner, instead of committing the murder in

person, had perhaps had Michel put out of the way by a hired cut-throat, one of his own people for instance. The Count de Brannes's servants only knew the German's retainers by sight, and could say nothing about them. Besides, they were unanimous in believing in the poacher's guilt, and Julien soon saw that no one at the château agreed with his views.

There was another side of the question the young advocate wished to clear up. He confessed to himself that the murder of a keeper by this wealthy foreigner was hard to understand, and, that to prove it, it was first necessary to discover what motive could have existed for the crime. Such a motive might come to light in tracing out the victim's antecedents, those of the presumed murderer being shrouded in mystery, and quite unknown to the good folks of Charly. Julien made careful inquiry, and learnt that Michel's family name was Amstein, and that he had been born at Schlestadt, in Alsace, where he still had some relations, and where he had gone two years previously to take possession of a small sum left him by will. On leaving the army he had married a relation of Jacqueline's, who had died six months later, and after finishing two terms of service with the second regiment of Zouaves, he had entered the employ of M. de Brannes, with whom he had remained ever since. This information did not solve the problem. Still Julien was struck by one point, in which every body agreed. Michel, whilst alive, had on every possible occasion, showed a marked dislike for the tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers. It is true that he had never given any reason for this dislike, and that, like a true French Alsatian, he cordially detested the Germans. However, the old soldier was not a gossip by nature, and it was quite possible that he had borne M. Wassmann some grudge, the cause of which he had not thought proper to confide to his comrades.

After commencing his investigations at Charly, M. de la Chanterie prosecuted them further at Paris, and with greater success. M. Wassmann was well known in a certain circle of society, where no questions were asked as to his antecedents, provided he spent plenty of money. Paris is hospitable to foreigners, so hospitable that it is only necessary to be a Brazilian or an Armenian, to obtain unlimited credit and make any amount of dupes. Thus it was only natural that a German gentleman, living in fine style and paying his tradesmen with exemplary regularity, should enjoy all possible consideration. In the neighbourhood of the Rue de Presbourg, where he was splendidly quartered, M. Wassmann was only spoken of with the greatest admiration. Julien soon understood that he must look elsewhere, and the idea occurred to him of becoming a member of the club, to which the foreigner had lately been admitted. Captain Henri de Brannes, who belonged to it, at once undertook to be his cousin's sponsor, and this was the state of matters when a most peculiar adventure befell our amateur detective. Julien resided in the right wing of a large mansion in the Rue de Verneuil; the family to whom the house belonged lived two-thirds of the year on their country estate, and were not sorry to make something out of their town property, which was far too large for the solitary residence of an old dowager and two children. The young lawyer's rooms were thus within easy distance of the Palais de Justice, and quite close to the town residence of his uncle and cousin, on the Quai d'Orsay. Julien's abode was indeed just suited to a man whose position requires that he should work and also go into society; and as for a gay life the young advocate had pretty well abandoned all folly since Mademoiselle de Brannes had left the convent; stills if needs be he only had to cross the Seine and Tuileries garden to reach the brilliant neighbourhood of the Madeleine and the Champs-Élysées. Besides, this old, narrow Rue de Verneuil, although it does not seem of much account at the first glance, has here and

there a certain aristocratic look, which is missing in the neighbouring, bustling Rue du Bac. You still meet with old arched gateways, piercing balconied frontages, with high garden walls covered with moss close by. There is indeed an odour of eighteenth-century antiquity about the street, and no wealthy *parvenu* would think of settling down there to enjoy the fortune he had gained by speculating on the Stock Exchange.

Julien, who was neither an upstart nor a millionaire, found himself most comfortable in his apartments, which communicated with a large garden, of which he had free use, from the end of spring till the end of autumn. The rooms were partly on the ground floor and partly on the floor above, and faced a courtyard on the one side, the garden on the other; two of the windows overlooking the Rue de Verneuil. M. de la Chanterie here led the life of a young man who is rich enough to enjoy every comfort, and yet not sufficiently wealthy to maintain a large household. The days are over when the heroes of Paul de Kock's novels kept their phaetons on an income of four hundred a year. Julien, who had three times as much, put up well enough with cabs, and contented himself with keeping one man-servant. He breakfasted at home, dined at a restaurant, and spent his evenings no matter where, when M. de Brannes and his daughter were not in Paris.

Since the death of the unfortunate keeper, his life had been somewhat irregular, on account of his having to keep himself informed as to the progress of the criminal inquiry, and of having to make frequent journeys to Charly. Not a day passed but what he hurried in the morning to the Palais de Justice, and then in the evening took the train to see his uncle. His visits to the magistrate in no way incommoded him; for this worthy official always received him good-naturedly, and had no objection to telling him what exact point the case had reached, nor did he remonstrate with him about his persevering faith in the gamekeeper's innocence. At Charly, however, Julien's position was more ambiguous, as M. de Brannes insisted on his proving the gamekeeper's guilt, and Mademoiselle de Brannes strenuously maintained that the fellow ought to be set at liberty. He thus had to exercise the greatest diplomacy and skill in rendering an account of his proceedings, so as not to discontent either the father or the daughter. Gabrielle certainly had some pity on him, and did not bother him too much, while he gave his explanations to the count; but she knew wonderfully well how to draw him into a corner of the drawing-room, under pretext of showing him some old musical scores, and there call upon him to declare the truth, and make him swear, with one hand on Beethoven's pastoral symphony, that he would never abandon the man she protected. It happened pretty often that these bits of musical bye-play, and the games of backgammon he played with his uncle, made him miss the last train, and he was then obliged to sleep at the château, where, moreover, a bedroom was always reserved for his special use. On these occasions he left early the next morning, so as to have time to call at his own house before paying his daily visit to the Palais de Justice.

One day when he had been thus delayed, on returning home at about nine o'clock, he was surprised to find his valet waiting for him with a look of dismay on his face. This servant, who had only been with him for a year or so, was a first-rate retainer, and prided himself on his stolid countenance, which was usually as expressionless as the lovely heads which stare at one in hairdressers' windows. To account for his troubled looks on this occasion, some catastrophe must have happened in the house; and in fact M. Laurent, on being closely questioned by his master, confessed that he had passed the night away from home to nurse his brother-in-law, who was ill, and that he had just come back

and discovered that some one had effected a forcible entrance into the rooms during the night. He had determined not to touch anything, so as not to compromise himself, and he had been on the point of warning the commissary of police, when M. de la Chanterie arrived. Julien did not in the least believe in the brother-in-law's illness, for he was pretty well up to the dodges of servants of the present day ; still he did not hint this to M. Laurent, but hastened to ascertain how far he had been despoiled by his nocturnal visitors. They had effected their entry by a ground floor window, the venetian blinds of which had been sawn through and the glass cut out, with a skill which would have done credit to a discharged convict. This window belonged to a smoking-room, which M. de la Chanterie seldom used in summer, and you passed from this apartment into the drawing and dining-rooms. The bedroom, dressing-room and study were all on the first floor. Naturally Julien first visited the lower rooms, and discovered, with mingled satisfaction and surprise, that some fine pieces of plate, in full view on the dining-room sideboard, had not been abstracted. The sideboard cupboards and drawers certainly stood open, but the silver forks and several valuable odds and ends had been left untouched. A suspicion at once dawned on Julien's mind, and he hastily climbed the staircase, followed by his servant, who gave vent to his feelings in occasional muttered exclamations. In the bedroom the thieves had shown less discretion, and above all, less disinterestedness. They had broken open a buhl table, in which Julien locked up his family papers, private correspondence, and ready money. About a hundred louis, which he had left there the evening before, had evidently passed into the pockets of these light-fingered gentry, for not one of them remained ; but the rogues had no doubt hoped to find some bank-notes as well, for a leather case stuffed full of letters had been ripped open and emptied on the floor.

Julien, enraged by such profanation—for these letters had been written by his mother, whom he had lost—hastily picked up his souvenirs, and discovered that all the missives had been carefully examined, each of them having been withdrawn from its envelope. It was evident that the burglars had been very particular as to what they passed over, or they would not have spent their time in such a way. In the study matters were still worse. The pigeon-holes and cardboard boxes had been ransacked, and the thieves had not even taken the trouble to close them. The volumes in the bookcase also appeared to have undergone a close scrutiny, for they no longer occupied their usual places on the shelves ; some had been replaced upside down, while others lay scattered on the floor. Such was the scene that one might have thought that Julien's favourite room had been sacked. However, some valuable weapons which decorated the panels of the wall did not appear to have excited the greed of these strange thieves. They had not been touched, and the same was the case with a beautiful old clock, and several other artistic objects. The scoundrels who had succeeded in entering these rooms were certainly not connoisseurs in curiosities, but on the other hand they displayed an unusual liking for old papers.

M. de la Chanterie was so struck by this curious preference, that instead of trying to bring the men to justice by calling in the police, he preferred to remain quite alone to think leisurely over the matter. He began by scolding his valet most severely, and forbade his reporting the affair to the police-station, or telling any one whatever about it. However unusual this course may have been, Laurent received his master's orders with perfect composure, and promised to execute them faithfully, whereupon Julien dismissed him, telling him to have the broken window repaired and the venetian blinds replaced by shutters coated with sheet-iron. The young advocate then shut himself up, and

began to examine everything more closely, and to reflect upon the cause of this peculiar piece of burglary. Ought he to attribute the affair to some common malefactors, or ought he rather to believe that the intruders had been prompted by some other motive than greed? "Suppose it were that wretched Wassmann who effected an entry here, so as to try and get hold of the letter I picked up in the Bélière woods!" thought Julien. "First of all, though, does he know I have that letter?"

He tried to remember, and quickly realised that his idea was quite plausible. If the man he had met and pursued in the Bélière woods were really the rich foreigner of the Pavillon des Sorbiers, Wassmann must from his hiding-place have seen him pick up, unfold, and read the paper forming the gun wad. Julien even remembered that a little while afterwards, on the banks of the Marne, in the heat of his altercation with the pretended landscape-painter, the latter had not drawn a revolver from his pocket, or assumed a warlike attitude, until he, La Chanterie, had happened to boast of his discovery. Consequently the German was perfectly well aware that the letter was in an enemy's hands; and as he had taken the trouble to disguise himself and hunt in the bushes for the wad, he must naturally attach great importance to its possession. Moreover, although the magistrate, in questioning Wassmann, had not named his denunciator, the German could not have made a mistake as to the latter's identity.

All this was quite admissible, so that it was natural to believe that the burglary had been committed with the sole object of abstracting this compromising document. The murderer had no doubt fancied that M. de la Chanterie had hidden the letter in some secret drawer or corner, and that by scouring the room from top to bottom, one would surely end by discovering it. "Luckily I carry it in my pocket-book, about my person," murmured Julien, delighted at his own prudence.

There was, however, one weak point in his ingenious deductions, and this was the theft of the hundred louis locked up in the buhl table. The nocturnal operator had not touched the plate or the jewels, but he had appropriated the gold without the least scruple. Such conduct on the part of a millionaire, however great a rascal he might be, seemed really out of place, and the young lawyer, who realised its improbability, was again assailed by doubts. After racking his brain, trying to arrive at some explanation of the matter, he ended by remembering that in a case in which a will had been stolen, and which had been tried at the Paris Assizes, the culprit, a man in good circumstances, had appropriated a small sum of money at the same time as his uncle's will, and that with the sole view of diverting suspicion from himself. Now Wassmann was quite capable of playing the same trick. Or still more likely, he might have employed a confederate, and have given him M. de la Chanterie's cash as his share of the spoils.

Julien's final conclusion was, that the burglary had been committed by Michel's murderer, and that it was the first engagement in the warfare which had been tacitly declared, on the day of the chase through Bélière woods. How would this warfare be carried on? Would the German resort to violence against his adversary? In any case it was best for Julien to go armed in future, so as to be ready for all emergencies; and to avoid returning home on foot at a late hour. It suddenly occurred to him that his valet had perhaps been bribed by Wassmann, and that he had purposely absented himself during the night of the theft. This idea was worth inquiring into, for it would have been a terrible piece of imprudence to retain one of the enemy's accomplices as a servant, and La Chanterie in the first moment of distrust

all but dismissed his smart servant Laurent. However, after reflecting more coolly on the matter, he came to the conclusion, that if Laurent had been in connivance with the German, he would have managed matters more cleverly. For instance, he would have cleared away all traces of disorder among the portfolios, card-board boxes, books, and papers, so that his master might have believed that the theft had been committed under ordinary circumstances. So it was much more likely he had spent the night at some party, such as servants often get up among themselves, unless, indeed, he had been strutting about at some public ball in M. de la Chanterie's clothes.

Wassmann, who had probably set a watch on the mansion in the Rue de Verneuil, might easily have ascertained that there was no one in the rooms that night, and that it was consequently a good opportunity to break into them. Moreover, perhaps it was more prudent for Julien to keep his servant, than to dismiss him, for, once out of his service, the fellow would not have failed to talk about the matter; whilst by detaining him Julien could watch his conduct closely. He decided to do so, and having thus determined on his future programme, indoors as well as out, he felt calmer, ready to face every complication and danger that might arise, and full of confidence in the final issue of the struggle he had begun with M. Wassmann.

He was particularly anxious to measure his strength with his enemy at the club, to which he had requested his cousin to introduce him, and, as it happened, the news of his admission reached him on the morning after the burglary. Henri de Brannes wrote that he had been unanimously elected, and that he would meet him at the club at midnight, to introduce him to some friends who had exerted themselves to procure his admission. The captain added that he relied on Julien's punctuality, the more so as he wished to speak to him on a personal matter.

La Chanterie was all the more disposed to keep the appointment, as a presentiment warned him that his adversary would be at the club that night, and that chance might provide him with an occasion to study him. The hour mentioned by Henri was well chosen, moreover, being that when the nocturnal life of clubmen commences; after meeting at their clubs before dinner they almost invariably return there on coming out of the theatre, or leaving the party they have been attending. As a rule, in the month of July, there are not so many members present; but in that year, 1870, owing to the prevalent rumours of war, one might expect that all the clubmen who had not previously left for Baden or Trouville, would put in an appearance late in the evening to exchange remarks on the great question of the day. It was possible also that M. Wassmann, who called himself an officer in the Austrian service, would profit of the opportunity to give public expression to the antipathy which he must surely feel for the victors of Sadowa. Julien, was, therefore, delighted at the chance of meeting him and studying him closely.

He also felt considerable satisfaction at having been elected a member; not that he had feared that his respectability might be disputed, but he knew wonderfully well what club feelings were, and that the most irreproachable candidate was liable to be black-balled. In Paris, in the privileged circle of the large clubs, it suffices for someone to take a dislike to your face, or the colour of your hair, for him and his clique to pelt you with black-balls. Some members take an unspeakable delight in vexing a candidate, and preventing him from getting his foot on the ladder they have climbed themselves. This is a delight peculiar to Frenchmen, and it is all the greater, if the victim be richer and of a higher station than oneself.

It is true that the friends of the unfortunate victim retaliate later on by

black-balling the candidates whom their enemies sponsor. From which it follows that at last no one can get elected, and clubs have been known almost to fail through the constant refusal to admit new members. The candidates who have the best chances are those who are neither too rich, too handsome, nor too clever, or better still, those who are entirely unknown. It is to this last circumstance, and sometimes to the other three, that foreigners are almost always indebted for their admission. Thus Julien, who was well off, good-looking and witty, ought to have esteemed himself very lucky at not having met with any more opposition than had fallen to the lot of that enigmatical personage, M. Wassmann, who had come upon Paris society like an *aérolite*. The young fellow at once wrote to his cousin to thank him, and tell him that he would be at the club at midnight. After which he sorted his tumbled papers, and put them away again.

Having ascertained that none of his deeds or letters had been stolen he breakfasted heartily, dressed, and went as usual to the Palais de Justice, where he found every one talking about politics, and spreading all sorts of insane reports. The investigation had been adjourned, and the magistrate was not in chambers. Thus the poacher's bold defender learnt nothing new about the case, so that he spent the rest of the day in combining various strategical movements designed to secure M. Wassmann's detection. For a minute he thought of going to Charly, but he reflected that his uncle would very likely detain him for a game at backgammon, so that he might miss his appointment at the club. He decided, therefore, to remain in Paris, returned home to dress, dined in his own neighbourhood, and at a little before ten walked slowly towards the Boulevards. He meant to stroll about there quietly till it was almost midnight, and had no anticipation of the strange adventures in store for him.

Paris constantly changes in manners and appearance. She is gay or sad, she laughs or growls, bestirs herself or falls to sleep, according to the hour, the season, the winds that are blowing, and the ideas that are sprouting in men's minds. There are days when the city almost looks like a provincial town, when the hot sun of some August Sunday has driven the crowd towards the suburban stations, and when passers-by appear only here and there on deserted spots looking like human waifs and strays at sea on an ocean of asphalt. On other occasions, Paris is more like London, when a fine November rain splashes against the umbrellas held aslant like shields, and when long streams of bustling, muddy people dart over the sloppy pavements. There are other days when every one looks sprightly, with chin in air, and minds full of springtide thoughts, when women sport white parasols, and make the high heels of their new boots ring on the dry pavement.

Moreover, there are other days, gloomy ones, when mad ideas and tempestuous passions fill the heads of the citizens, who suddenly tear up the paving stones and raise barricades, to the sound of some idiotic refrain. The Boulevards are the heart of Paris, as Paris is the heart of France, and no one can ever forget the strange appearance which they presented on the evening of the 12th July of that fatal year of bloodshed, 1870. Julien de la Charterie, who had been diverted from his usual habits by the murder at Charly, had not seen the Boulevards for several days, and he had not the least idea of what now occurred there between eight o'clock and midnight regularly every evening. Thus, he was a good deal surprised, and greatly disgusted, when, on turning out of the Rue Vivienne, he found himself caught in the formidable crowd, which rolled incessantly from the Rue Montmartre to the New Opera House. The extraordinary uproar was something quite unknown to him. It

was not a riot, for the police officials did not interfere; it was not a festival either, for there were no illuminations; perhaps it was something of both—half revolution, half holiday making. A compact, surging crowd covered the footways, overflowing on either side, so that vehicles could hardly get along. Sometimes the throng ebbed like the waves of the sea; at others it darted along again, or opened spontaneously, as it were, to make way for bands of dreadful-looking ruffians, who rushed about singing "*To Berlin*," to the tune of *Les Lampions*. Then this crowd, composed of half-frightened, idle, inquisitive and peaceful citizens, took up the refrain, "*To Berlin*," and cheered the scoundrels warmly. Women stood on tip-toe shouting "Long live War!" while street arabs slid between the legs of fat citizens, shouting "Down with Prussia!" Now and then a dissentient voice was heard here and there, timidly answering "Long live Peace!" but this sentiment was almost always received with loud hisses. The immense majority of this maddened populace demanded that the soldiers should start for the fight, like the sire de Framboisy, though they themselves had not the least wish to cross the frontier. It was thus that they brought on that bellicose carnival, for which France would still blush, had she not cruelly expiated it, and especially had she not gloriously paid for it with the blood of her heroic children. The Boulevard, inundated by the swarming, yelling mob, looked like the yard of some vast lunatic asylum, and, as if to engrave the date forcibly on the Parisian mind, a total eclipse gradually darkened the disk of the moon—the true star of the dead. Lounging never forgoes its own inclination, and so some people neglected politics to watch the eclipse.

Julien, sick at heart, was on the point of turning back, when he yielded to a feeling of curiosity, which urged him to ascertain for himself, how far the idiocy of the street brawlers and the improvidence of the Government would go. He also recollected that the club, where he had an appointment at midnight, was close to the Champs Elysées, and that to reach it the shortest way was to proceed towards the Madeleine. Having determined to brave the noise and disturbance, the young fellow prepared to enter the thick of the crowd. He was sufficiently tall and strong to disregard the crush, and he had no reason for hurrying. So he crossed the roadway, and gained the opposite foot pavement, which is always the more crowded of the two, even on ordinary occasions, and which on this particular evening was covered with a swarming mob.

It was not without some difficulty that Julien succeeded in gaining a foothold on it, but when he had wedged himself into the crowd he had only to let himself drift along towards the Rue Drouot. Elbowing the others and elbowed himself, and above all disgusted by this rough promiscuity, Julien went on amid an indescribable hubbub, trying in vain to discern a face he knew among the moving mass of people.

Folks say that Paris revolutions are always foretold by the appearance in the better parts of the city of ragged ruffians, who presage the erection of barricades, just as crows announce the coming of winter. This time, however, the invasion of the Boulevard seemed of a less sinister character. The unusual faces which had appeared were almost all beardless, though they had the appearance of emerging from the depths of the city. Parties of suspicious-looking youths came along in single and double file, holding on to one another by their long white blouses, and pushing through the crowd, singing filthy songs to patriotic airs. You would have thought that all the scullions and pot-boys of the city had been recruited to form an army of disorder. At that time, indeed, the white blouse was almost equivalent to a uniform, and its wearers

had been already seen at work three months previously, when they had smashed the Boulevard kiosks and lamps. Who had recruited them, and thrown them upon Paris, with instructions to disturb honest folks and masquerade in favour of a declaration of war? No one has ever known, and M. de Brannes's nephew was unable even to make a guess, though he scrutinised the fellows closely. If any one questioned them they replied by insulting names in slang, and if an arrest was attempted, they slipped away like adders. Julien, furious at their impudence, was unsparing in his elbow thrusts, and such was his exasperation that he would willingly have come to open blows with them; however, he could not find a chance to chastise any of them, and without any fighting he at length reached the vicinity of the Passage de l'Opéra. This was the real centre of the tumult. The footway here is the favourite meeting-place of open-air speculators, who brave the inclemency of the seasons, to traffic after dinner on the credit of States. And, at this supreme hour, when France was about to risk her power, her very existence, in a colossal struggle, never had a finer occasion presented itself to these gamblers who staked on victory or defeat. They had no preference, and were patriotic or unpatriotic according to their "engagements." The "bears" shamelessly desired war and a long series of disasters. Their dream was that the French army might lose a battle on the eve of each settlement. Really, the fellows in the white blouses were not as bad as that!

As the two streams of speculators and rioters collided, it resulted that, between the Rue Drouot and the Rue Le Peletier, there was a seething mass of people, who revolved round and round like in a whirlpool. There was knocking and pushing, and a horrible vociferous clamour, in which Bourse quotations were mingled with verses of the *Marseillaise*; the speculators' shouts rising above the singing.

Julien could stand it no longer. He had put up with being hustled by the fellows in blouses, but he disliked being brushed against by money-jobbers, and he tried to break loose from the crowd by gaining the macadamised roadway; however, it was still harder to get off the footway than to get on it. Indeed, Julien soon realised that he was so well entangled in the crowd, that he would have great difficulty in breaking free from it, in spite of all his vigour and skill. By dint of giving several rough blows to those who pressed too closely round him, he succeeded in getting a little nearer the roadway, but only to find himself caught in a compact group of speculators, from whom it was still harder to escape.

These folks shouted and struggled to such a degree that Julien was simultaneously deafened and squeezed. It was in vain he used his elbows, he did not get a foot further. On the contrary, he was completely surrounded and driven little by little against a kiosk occupied by a newspaper vendor. Then, for the first time since he had found himself among this disreputable rabble, it suddenly occurred to him, that the people pressing around, had evil designs upon his person. It was his first glance at their faces that made him think this. They all had an evil expression of countenance; hooked noses, flat faces, pointed beards or spreading whiskers. By a sort of intuition, La Chanterie at once remembered M. Wassmann and kept on his guard, that is to say, he crossed his arms over his chest, so as to protect his pockets.

It was a wise precaution, for he almost directly felt some hands stealing over his person, with the evident intention of searching him. Did these hands belong to some common pick-pocket in search of money? Under any other circumstances the Count de Brannes's nephew would not have doubted it; for he had very strong ideas on the morality of the folks who swarm in these parts.

But he also knew that the famous letter was in his pocketbook, under the left-hand flap of his frock coat, and that if he was not careful it would be stolen from him.

There was nothing to prove that the pushing, followed by the feeling of his person, were not a continuation, or rather the renewal in another form, of the attempt made at his dwelling-place on the preceding night. M. Wassmann's agents having discovered nothing in the cupboards at his rooms in the Rue de Verneuil, had concluded that he carried the document which they wished to secure about his person, and they were now profiting by this chance meeting to search his clothes, after having uselessly rummaged all his drawers. It was quite possible that he had been followed ever since the morning, without being aware of it; tracked as police officers call it, and that on the moment he mixed with the crowd an attack had been planned on his person. The young lawyer made all these reflections in less time than it takes to record them, and he suited his actions to the thought. Without a word to the unmannerly fellows who pressed so hard upon him he began by administering some roughish kicks. Then, when by the help of this violence he had made a little more room for himself, he freed his right arm, without ceasing, however, to keep the left one tightly pressed against the pocket containing the precious document. Finally, and with his muscular "dexter," he dealt without further ceremony a rapid series of blows on such noses as were within his reach. His antagonists drew back with loud exclamations of pain and anger, knocking over some people who stood behind them, and the tumble becoming a general one, Julien espied various faces which he had previously been unable to see. By the light of a street lamp which illuminated the scene he even recognised the tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers in the centre of a knot of people near by. The men who surrounded this suspicious personage were of better appearance than the rogues with whom Julien had just been scuffling. They were German bankers as far as one could judge by their faces. Wassmann, being a millionaire, probably held many valuable securities, and he was no doubt very much interested in the mad speculations then going on, as a rise or fall might greatly affect the value of his property. His presence here could thus be very easily explained. However, Julien felt none the less certain that the tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers was actuated by other and much less allowable motives. Still he did not think it a fit time for questioning him, but considered himself lucky to be able to get out of his difficulty without further trouble. One masterly blow of his fist sufficed to clear him a way through the crowd, whereupon he darted behind the newspaper kiosk, slid between two vehicles, and hurried off down the Boulevard, being followed only by the curses of the fellows he had vanquished. Moreover their shouts were soon drowned in the general hubbub, and the plucky fellow was able to reach the opposite side of the thoroughfare in safety. He had not for an instant withdrawn his left hand from over his chest, and his pocketbook was still quite safe.

He was once more able to breathe, but on recovering himself he did not feel at all easy as to the future. If his suppositions were correct, and not mere shadowy fears, if he had rightly believed M. Wassmann to be at the bottom of all he had gone through, the struggle was only beginning, and seemed likely to be a warm one. He feared nothing for his own person, but he was not so easy as regarded the fragmentary letter which chance had placed in his hands. How could he safely keep this paper on which all his hopes of success depended? Where could he secrete it so as to baffle the audacious attempts of men who in their efforts to obtain possession of it, did not hesitate to commit either a burglary, or an aggravated assault?

Julien again asked himself whether he would not do better to finish as he ought to have begun, that is, to simply place the letter in the hands of the investigating magistrate. However, this course seemed to him like throwing up the lead, renouncing the mission that Gabrielle had entrusted to him, and deserting the cause of an innocent man whom he had sworn to defend. He said to himself that there would always be plenty of time to adopt this course when the Assizes were near at hand, supposing he could not then throw additional light on the case. The production of this letter, the contents of which so ill accorded with the theory of Robert's guilt, might influence the verdict in his favour, and in any case its production would be of assistance in the defence.

Thus M. de la Chanterie determined to defer handing it to the authorities. But he realised that it was necessary he should get rid of it as soon as possible, and secrete it in some place of safety for fear of its being stolen from him. But who would accept such a trust? To whom could he apply on so delicate a matter? After prolonged reflection he could only think of the curé of Charly. M. Jean was a man to understand the reasons which Julien could give him, and moreover, he was a person whose discretion could be relied upon. La Chanterie accordingly made up his mind to go and see him at the parsonage the very next day, to explain to him the exact state of matters, and win his consent to accept the trust. The paper once placed without any one's knowledge in the hands of the worthy priest, the young advocate would then be able to defy all M. Wassmann's attempts. A fresh burglary might be committed in his rooms, or an attempt made to plunder him out of doors, but at all events the letter would not be taken from him.

Delighted at his idea—still more so at the thought that he had twice spoiled his formidable antagonist's little game—Julien went towards the club, where he felt sure of seeing Wassmann again. He was anxious to observe him more closely, and on neutral ground where he could study him at his ease. He particularly wished to see what his demeanour would be when chance (which chance, he, Julien, meant to bring about), led the conversation to the subject of the gatherings on the boulevard.

It was growing late, and the club being situated at some distance from the Passage de l'Opéra, there was only just time for Julien to get there by midnight, even if he walked fast. He put his best foot foremost and reached the Madeleine without meeting with any further adventure. The nearer he got to the Champs Elysées, the more the crowd and the uproar diminished, for the rioters had naturally selected that part of Paris where there is most traffic of an evening, and did not wander far from it. Their pretended enthusiasm for war needed plenty of spectators to back it up. Julien took care to turn round once or twice to see if any one were following him, but he caught sight of nothing either suspicious or doubtful. He was in no danger of attack in this neighbourhood, and the remainder of his walk was quite uneventful.

The club was located in a splendid house most brilliantly lighted up, and from its windows, which had been opened on account of the extreme heat, there came a sound of voices engaged in animated conversation, proof positive that the gathering was a pretty large one. M. de la Chanterie walked into the hall, where he found a squad of sumptuously attired footmen, who were discussing the latest news given in the evening papers. However, at Julien's request one of them hurried off to fetch the Viscount de Brannes, who appeared a minute later with that beaming expression of countenance which sits so well on an officer who has the prospect of a campaign before him. He at once took his cousin's arm, and guided him up the fine

staircase which led to the reception rooms of the club. "You've dropped in just in time," he said; "our president, and all of my friends who voted and canvassed for you, are here. In five minutes you will have been duly introduced, and made at home."

Julien allowed himself to be led off, and Henri, having made him cross a long gallery and a reading room, ushered him into an immense *salon*, where the first person he espied was M. Wassmann, who was holding forth in the midst of an attentive audience. Julien felt somewhat surprised to see him already there, for he had left him in front of the Passage de l'Opéra, busy with financial transactions, and he had hardly expected to find him, less than an hour afterwards, engaged in a grave discussion on the likelihood of war, and forming the centre of a group in the large red drawing room of the club. Plainly enough, M. Wassmann was a very active man, as quick in changing his occupation as his costume. He had given good proof of the latter in the Bélière woods.

However, the captain did not give his cousin time to deliberate on the point. He took his arm again, and made him go through the usual round of introductions, about which there was no solemnity, for they were limited, as usual there, to handshakes and the exchange of a few polite remarks in different parts of the room. Moreover, M. de la Chanterie was already known to most of those he had to thank, so that his introduction was a matter of pure form. He felt quite at home, and was not at all embarrassed in speaking to people who belonged to his own set, and recognised him as one of themselves.

The club to which Henri had secured his admission was composed of men of various kinds, fast fellows, serious people, important officials, and infatuated sportsmen; old beaux, whose superannuated elegance dated from the Restoration; and young chaps who were rather before the times than behind them; military men were rather numerous, some of them being of high rank; while others, such as Captain de Brannes, occupied prominent positions by reason of their fortune and high family connections. The bar had, so far, not been represented, but Julien had not been admitted on the strength of his legal profession. His wit and disposition would have won him all suffrages even if he had not been related to Henri de Brannes.

This young staff-officer, son of a rich and aristocratic count, was a general favourite at the club. The gravest members appreciated his refined manners and perfect courtesy. The younger ones liked him for his unassuming humour and military spirit. He was the life and soul of the groups which collected every evening in cosy corners to chat over all sorts of amusing subjects; whilst the old boys played at whist, and the politicians discussed the questions of the day in front of the fireplace.

Julien, of course, reaped the benefit of his cousin's popularity, and found himself cordially welcomed by young and old members alike. Only he had not time to converse at any length with his new friends, for, as soon as the necessary formalities had been gone through, Henri de Brannes drew him hurriedly aside, to talk to him. La Chanterie had expected something of the kind, and half guessed what his cousin wished to speak to him about. He allowed himself to be led on to the balcony, though he would have preferred to mingle with the throng gathered around M. Wassmann. However, he comforted himself by reflecting that the captain's confidences would certainly relate to the Pavillon des Sorbiers, and its inmates of either sex, so that the conversation would not stray far from the subject in which he was so greatly interested. He was not mistaken in his surmise.

"My dear fellow," began Henri, as soon as they were comfortably leaning

against the balcony railing, beyond the hearing of indiscreet listeners, "I want to ask your advice."

"Advice!" repeated Julien, not without a slight expression of amusement. "You know well enough that people only ask for advice in order to steer clear of it."

"That depends on what it's about," said the captain, evasively. "I own I have often acted quite contrary to the advice I've received, but just now I'm perfectly earnest in what I say to you, and I thoroughly intend to rely on your counsel and experience."

"If it's anything to do with love affairs my advice won't count for much; and as for my experience, you are two years ahead of me, and have done a lot more campaigning than I have in the land of flirtation."

"Oh! pray don't go the schoolboy tack. You navigated amid the Paris shoals and breakers when I was still a cadet at Saint-Cyr, so you must be quite able to help me."

"I assure you I am but a poor doctor in such matters."

"All right. I know what to believe my good fellow; and, between ourselves, the fact that you have been going in for a steady life during the last six months isn't a reason why you should forget all about old times, especially as you have not got such a clean bill after all. Don't alarm yourself; I shan't tell Gabrielle that I applied to you, any more than I ever told her of a certain boating expedition."

"I don't see what your sister has got to do with this," said Julien, warmly; "let me know what you want, as you are so determined on this point. I'll answer as well as I can."

"That's a proper reply. Very well then, it is a question of a fascinating young person whom you recently had the luck to admire on the banks of the Marne on a certain awfully hot day, when you had been hunting a man in my father's wood."

"Mademoiselle Wassmann you mean. I agree with you, she is charming," said Julien, without the least display of enthusiasm.

"Much more so than you are aware, my dear fellow," exclaimed the captain. "I know her now and can appreciate her worth. I didn't play the fool like you did, but duly called at the Pavillon des Sorbiers. Mademoiselle Catherine is a real beauty, an out-and-outer. I won't say anything about her looks as you've seen her, but she has all the wit and grace of a Frenchwoman, with just a touch of wistful melancholy, which puts the finish on her perfection. Besides, she was born at Vienna, and the Viennese are no more like other Germans than a rose is like a poppy."

"Granted! But probably, you don't want my opinion as to her physical and intellectual merits? How are you now situated as regards this feminine marvel?"

"We have reached the point when one understands one another without need of talking; and when eyes own what lips dare not say; in fact, when one feels that one loves, and only waits for a good chance to write it or declare it by word of mouth."

"That Mademoiselle Wassmann loves you I'm quite ready to believe; but that you yourself are really in love with her seems more doubtful to me."

"Pray what makes you think that?"

"Because I doubt whether you could ever fall seriously in love; but let's hear what you want to know."

"Very good, my dear fellow, I think that if I care to become the son-in-law of a foreign gentleman who is a millionaire, three or four times over, and father

of the most charming girl I ever met, I have only to ask for his consent, and, as whatever you like to say, I entertain a very deep and sincere affection for her, I feel tempted to take the irrevocable step."

"What prevents you?" asked Julien, rather coolly.

"What prevents me? Really you are too bad. Why, deuce take it, a heap of things prevent me. In the first place there's my father, who always doesn't seem to like his neighbour; I have never been able to find out why, by the way, for he has not made such a fool of himself as you have, and taken an officer of high rank for a murderer. I hope, however, that even you have given up that insane idea. Well, after all, I rather hesitate to make the plunge."

"And you're quite right, for there's another reason why you should not declare yourself—a reason which you haven't even hinted to me—and yet it ought to suffice to deter you from making a proposal."

"What's that?"

"Why isn't war close at hand! I suppose you don't reckon upon stopping at Charly or in Paris, all through the campaign in Prussia?"

"Certainly not; on the contrary, I hope to be attached to the head-quarters staff, and be one of the first to leave Paris."

"Well, I must say that this prospect is not quite in keeping with your matrimonial intentions."

"Pooh! The war will all be over in two or three months at the most; it will last just long enough to win one or two battles; after our second victory Prussia will hand us the left bank of the Rhine; and at the worst, even if she makes a fuss over it, we shall press on to Berlin. At all events, everything will be finished by the autumn; I shall come back with a rise in rank and just in time to be married before the winter; only, if I want to acquaint my future father-in-law with my intentions, I have no time to lose."

"What! You as well," sighed Julien; "you also have the silly idea into your head, that this war will be a short and easy one!"

"Ah! I see, you're one of those who talk about the Prussians like children do of bogies! I know all about it—Prussian strategy, eh? and tactics, eh? and then the *landwehr*, an army of old tailors and bootmakers—very dreadful, isn't it? but believe me, my dear fellow, keep these fears for yourself and your brother lawyers, and leave the fighting to the army men."

"I shall have to fight as well," said La Chanterie softly, "for no doubt they will soon call out the Garde Mobile."

"Oh! we've not got to that yet," exclaimed the captain; "and I am greatly afraid that you won't have the chance of being under fire."

"Perhaps not; but you speak of marrying Mademoiselle Wassmann, as if she were a French girl. Are you quite sure her father won't cross the frontier, as soon as the war—which is almost upon us—is declared?"

"What, he! don't you know then that he was wounded at Sadowa, and execrates the Prussians? Ah! he would never leave France at such a moment—the brave Austrian that he is! No, no, he is quite on our side, and proclaims it openly. Just listen to what he is saying about it now," said the captain, turning round towards the room, where M. Wassmann was still holding forth.

Julien did not regret the diversion. Firstly, as he hoped that the change of subject would enable him to shirk a direct answer to his cousin's questions; and secondly, he was most anxious to listen to, and closely observe, the man who occupied his mind to such a degree, and whom he had only once heard speak. He therefore lent a willing ear to M. Wassmann's talk, and even left the balcony and took a few steps across the room in order to lose nothing of his eloquence.

"Yes, gentlemen," the noble foreigner was saying, "Prussia will be utterly beaten, I'll answer for it, and shamefully beaten. She is not in a position to hold out for three months."

"It is asserted that she can put as many as six hundred thousand men in the field," timidly suggested a official of the Council of State.

"Of whom three hundred thousand belong to the militia, which five or six of your divisions would utterly rout," proceeded M. Wassmann not in the least disconcerted. "Those fellows form regiments, recruited in the provinces, commanded by burgomasters, who lead them in a patriarchal kind of way, as they would in the little towns whence they come. I leave you to guess if they will go under fire with very blithe hearts! And then you forget that in Prussia the harvest begins in the month of August, so that in three weeks' time these fine soldiers of the *landwehr* will dart off like hares to go and cut their rye."

"Hah! what did I tell you?" whispered the captain to Julien.

"What!" replied Julien, in an undertone; "with all your good sense, you a staff-officer, are satisfied with such reasoning as that, and believe in such utter nonsense!"

"On this point, gentlemen, you may take the word of an old soldier, who is thoroughly acquainted with the German army," added M. Wassmann, raising his voice, as if he wanted to be heard by the two cousins. "This war will be mere child's play for France; and if your Government hesitated over it, it would be very much to blame, for it would lose an excellent chance of coming to a final understanding with the Prussians, who are the worst soldiers in the whole of Germany."

"Permit me," said the same interruptor as before, "it seems to me that but four years ago, in June, 1866, it was said that the Austrians would beat the Frussians, and yet——"

"Whilst we ourselves were beaten," put in the ex-major of the Austrian army; "well, and what does that prove? That we are badly led, and that our commander-in-chief had an absurd plan. Do you want a proof of it? Then just listen to this story, which is well known in our part of the world, though I fancy that it is not familiar to you. The commander's plan was kept a secret till the commencement of hostilities; but, as its originator was very highly thought of, the army and the nation had perfect confidence in it. However, a few days before the beginning of the campaign the inhabitants of Prague, the capital of Bohemia, were greatly surprised to witness the hasty departure of the old Emperor Ferdinand, the uncle of our august sovereign. The Emperor Ferdinand had always resided in their town since his abdication, and, in fact, he had never once left it. Well, he was asked the reason of his abrupt departure, and it was respectfully represented to him that Bohemia ran no risk of being invaded by the enemy, the famous plan of the campaign having doubtless provided against any such contingency. However, Ferdinand began to laugh, and replied: 'My children, I know all this fine plan—Benedek's plan; the general himself explained it to me, and it is just because he *has* explained it to me—that I'm going off.'"

"That Emperor was a clever fellow," exclaimed Henri de Brannes, approaching the group of men who were roaring with laughter over M. Wassmann's story.

"There is nothing to show that France won't have her *Benedek's plan*, too," said Julien, sufficiently loud for the German to overhear and turn round towards him.

Their eyes met, and the tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers at once showed that he remembered M. de Brannes's nephew, for he smiled upon him most graciously.

Julien acknowledged this greeting by a very stiff bow. But he flattered himself wrongly, if he thought he was so easily rid of the obnoxious Wassmann. Captain Henri, who particularly wished to reconcile Julien with the father of the adorable Catherine, profited of this opportunity to renew the introduction which had previously taken place on the banks of the Marne.

"I remember perfectly well under what circumstances I had the honour of seeing Monsieur de la Chanterie for the first time," said M. Wassmann, as soon as Henri had gone through the usual form of introduction.

"I remember them as well as you do," retorted Julien with lofty disdain.

"And I regret that I have not previously had an opportunity of renewing our acquaintance," answered the foreigner politely.

"As for me, I saw you again, but an hour ago," hastily rejoined the young advocate.

"Really! Where was that," asked M. Wassmann, seemingly astonished.

"On the Boulevard, in front of the Passage de l'Opéra, and within a few feet of a crowd of ruffians, who were trying, I believe, to rob me."

La Chanterie gave this answer with such evident intention of insulting his antagonist that the captain flushed. Utterly confused at having brought such an attack upon a man whom he was anxious to conciliate, and furious with his excited cousin who played such tricks with him, Henri de Brannes tried to think of some remarks calculated to change the conversation and avert hostilities, which in his eyes would be a hundred times worse than those between Napoleon III. and King William of Prussia.

M. Wassmann spared him this trouble, however; he did not in the least lose his temper or take any notice of the offensive character of this little speech, which had apparently startled the very audience, for they looked at their new colleague as they might have looked at a dangerous lunatic. Meanwhile the imperturbable German answered quite coolly: "The crowd which assembles at the spot you mention is certainly very mixed, and although I have important interests at stake I never willingly compromise myself by mingling in it; however this evening I braved the crush as I had a most pressing order to give. I want to buy a large amount of French Rentes to-morrow when the Bourse opens. That will show you, gentlemen," added M. Wassmann, turning to the people round him; "that will tell you whether I rely on the success of your arms or not."

The clubmen greeted this conclusion with a murmur of applause, in which Julien naturally took no part. His cousin, who was but too well pleased by this pacific issue, then hastily caught hold of his arm and led him back to the balcony, which he deeply regretted having left.

"Upon my word, my dear fellow," he said, "you must tell me what you meant by such mad innuendoes? What the devil prompted you to treat a foreign officer with such impudence, when he has always behaved to you with perfect courtesy? Is it because he sides with France? Do you think it's acting kindly towards me to go on like that?"

"And do you think I am the dupe of all his fine phraseology," answered Julien, whose temper was beginning to rise. "I told you before, and I repeat my statement, that I hold that German in suspicion—and look here! you asked my advice just now respecting your intentions as regards his daughter. Well, it's useless for me to give you any, for you now ought to see clearly what opinion I hold of the father."

"Captain, will you play a game of whist with us?" exclaimed M. Wassmann, just as Henri was about to reply by a rather fierce sally to his cousin's remarks.

Gabrielle's brother felt it would be silly for him to quarrel seriously with Julien, and he had the wisdom to let the matter drop and go off to join in the Austrian's game.

As soon as La Chanterie was left alone, and rid of the presence of M. Wassmann, the mere sight of whom so greatly irritated him, he began to think things over, and felt rather ashamed at having let his temper carry him away in so absurd a fashion. He reflected that, for the first time he had gone to the club, he must have given his fellow members a peculiar idea of his character and education, and he especially regretted having lost his self-possession in presence of an enemy who played such a clever game. Julien's reflections on this subject only served to put him in a worse humour than before, as always happens when one is dissatisfied with one's self, and he thought it best to go home to bed without taking leave of his cousin. He was indeed about to retire when three young fellows came out on to the balcony and leant over the balustrade near him. They evidently belonged to that interesting set of dandies whom the Parisians called *petits crêlés*.* They had sallow faces, their hair was parted down the middle, and they seemed to have drunk more than was good for them. Julien was in no wise inclined to associate with them, and was going away when one of them exclaimed in a loud voice: "Whoever is that young fool who spoke so stupidly just now about France having her *Benedek's plans*?"

"I know nothing of him," replied one of the speaker's companions. "I never saw him here before."

Nothing more than the epithet just articulated was needed to rouse La Chanterie's indignation to a full pitch. "That young fool was myself," he exclaimed, catching hold of the arm of the impudent fellow who had thus described him. "And I mean to have satisfaction for your absurd remarks."

"Oh! this is rich," sneered the young dandy; "upon my word I never even saw you, but don't imagine that I am going to apologize—no, not if I know it!"

"I don't ask you to apologize," shouted M. de la Chanterie; "I only want your card."

"My card! all right, and where's yours?" answered the young dandy. "I don't know who you are."

"I hope not," said Julien, in a very disdainful tone; "you will know me well enough when I have given you the lesson that your impertinence so richly deserves."

"Oh! oh! we shall see all about that on the duelling-ground; and since you want to fight, here is the piece of pasteboard you require," sneered the amiable gentleman, who suddenly seemed to have regained his composure.

The Count de Brannes's nephew took the card which his opponent tendered and placed it in his pocket. "Here is mine," he said. "To-morrow, before noon, my seconds will call upon you."

Thereupon, without waiting for the dandy's reply, he turned his back on him and hastily left the club; for, since the beginning of the altercation it was only by the greatest effort that he had been able to refrain from boxing the coxcomb's ears, and he felt his patience nearly exhausted. He considered, moreover, that he had sufficiently scandalised his new colleagues by his peculiar way of addressing M. Wassmann; and, as he had a well-bred mau's horror of everything approaching a scene, he at once left the club, where he

* They would be called "mashe's" in England now-a-days.—*Trans.*

had made such an awkward *début*. He did not even take leave of his cousin, and for several reasons: first of all the captain was playing whist with M. Wassmann, whom he, Julien, did not care to speak to; and secondly, it seemed useless that he should inform Henri of the foolish quarrel he had just begun. So he went off quietly, allowing his opponent to triumph over his departure; and as he considered it imprudent to return home on foot after all the incidents of the evening, he hailed a passing cab and was driven to the Rue de Verneuil. There everything was once more in its accustomed order; Julien's valet was in attendance, and at once showed his master that the damage done on the previous night had been repaired during the day. Mons. Laurant had personally found and directed the various workmen; he had invented a story to explain how the window and shutters had been broken; and, thanks to his discretion, nobody in the neighbourhood was aware that a burglary had been committed that night at M. de La Chanterie's.

Julien considered that he had nothing more to fear about the precious paper as he had decided to entrust it as soon as possible to the curé of Charly, and he locked himself in his room to reflect over the situation in which imprudence had placed him. He found himself caught in a quarrel at the very time when he needed to keep his mind clear, and the prospect of a duel which, under any other circumstances, would not at all have disturbed him, was now extremely annoying. The next day, which he had hoped to devote to his uncle and Gabrielle, would hardly suffice for the preliminaries of the duel, and he must also somehow or other contrive to visit M. Jean beforehand to explain to him what he wanted. However, by getting up very early and showing the utmost exertion, he might still find time for all; and, so as to be astir at daybreak, he retired at once to rest, not, however, without giving a hasty glance at the card handed him by the fop on the balcony. The name he found upon it was quite unknown to him, though it was a very high-sounding one. This illustrious young dandy was named Monsieur Achille Miraut de Saint-Avertin, and Julien, who frequented a class of society into which people with well-authenticated titles were alone admitted, could not recall any aristocratic family of that name.

He could only conclude that a little time before some Miraut or other, who had made a fortune as a grocer or button manufacturer, had been seized with a desire to call himself by the name of his native village. This is a common enough custom among people of the middle classes, inimical as they are said to be to titles. With an income of fifty thousand francs people think they have a right to take the name of their native town; with an income of a hundred thousand and a deputyship, they venture to assume that of their department, and become Monsieur du Cantal or De la Basse-Savoie; while, when they possess five hundred thousand francs a year they found a dynasty, as it were, clinging to the Christian name of some celebrated ancestor, remaining Casimir So-and-So to the end of time. M. de la Chanterie was not at all surprised that he had fallen on one of these self-created nobles, and, as it mattered very little to him whether his opponent were descended from a Crusader or a tobaccoconist, he went to sleep quite decided to send his seconds to M. Miraut, were the latter rightfully De Saint-Avertin or not.

Julien carried out this determination the next day. He called early in the morning on a friend whom he had selected by reason of his experience in duelling matters. Louis du Tremblay, who had been his chum at college and at the Law School, a great boating man, and as such the acknowledged chief of the Red Indian Club, was a resolute fellow, endowed with a strong arm and great skill as a fencer. A determined sportsman, angler, and seeker of

adventures, he was, moreover, well known in the gay world of Paris. In one word, just the very man to see the affair well through. At the first words that Julien spoke he pricked up his ears like a cavalry horse when he hears the bugle sound, and, after a quarter of an hour's conversation, he undertook to procure another "second" to communicate with those chosen by Julien's antagonist, and to arrange matters so that the duel might take place within twenty-four hours.

The young advocate, feeling certain that his representative would properly fulfil his mission, and being much less pre-occupied as to the chances of the duel than as to the safety of the torn letter, repaired that same morning to Charly, his journey being an uneventful one. He did not even espy the obnoxious face of M. Wassmann, though to reach the parsonage he had to pass in front of the Pavillon des Sorbiers.

M. Jean received Julien with his usual cordiality, and expressed his regret that he had nothing satisfactory to tell him. The poacher, whom he had seen on the previous evening at Mazas, was only spoiling his case by behaving impudently towards the examining magistrate, and speaking most harshly of his wife and children. M. Jean quite despaired of bringing the foolish fellow to a better state of mind and finding any new proofs in his favour. On the other hand, poor Eugénie was greatly distressed at not being able to see her husband, and she was visibly fading away. The worthy people who had received her into their home were now in trouble on their own side. Business was very bad, and what with the rumours of war, Antoine Cornier was greatly embarrassed for want of money. The good priest was, therefore, very sad at heart, and did not hide from M. de la Chanterie that he had no longer any hopes of saving Robert.

Julien thought it useless, for many reasons, to tell him of the recent incidents which so fully confirmed his opinion of M. Wassmann's rascality. He limited himself to saying that nothing was lost, as long as the poacher had not been convicted by the jury; and he handed him a sealed envelope, containing the fragmentary letter, without telling him in what its importance consisted, but begging him to take care of it, until he asked him for it again.

M. Jean promised to do so, and Julien returned to Paris, without putting in an appearance at the château, though it cost him a deal to pass so near to Gabrielle without seeing her. But he mistrusted himself, and feared his charming cousin's skill in making him say everything she chose. As he was naturally anxious that she should not know anything of the duel, he preferred to avoid an interview, in which he might have divulged his secret. However, he quite intended to return to Charly on the next day, as soon as the business was over. On reaching the Rue de Verneuil, he found his friend Du Tremblay, who had performed wonders in the way of speed. The duel was fixed for the following morning at five o'clock, on the island of Croissy, and swords were to be used. Du Tremblay had procured the necessary weapons, and had made an appointment with Julien's other second for the same evening at the Saint-Lazare station; for, according to his plan, they were all three to dine and sleep at Chatou, with which suburban locality he was perfectly well acquainted. He could not have arranged a boating party with greater expedition or care.

The arrangements quite suited Julien. The young lawyer was a fair swordsman; and preferred the weapon which had been chosen. As to the journey to Chatou, he was not at all sorry to have the prospect of a little recreation before him. The evening before a duel is always somewhat disagreeable from the bare fact of having to prepare your will in case of misadventure. He had no anxiety as to the fate of the precious letter which he had placed in the

hands of M. Jean. So nothing prevented his accepting the proposal of his active friend. He merely took the time to give his valet a few orders, and then entered the vehicle which had brought Du Tremblay and his swords.

When they reached the court-yard of the railway station their driver got entangled in a block of vehicles, and whilst he whipped away at his horses, trying to extricate himself from the crush, Julien, who had popped his head out of the window, to see what was amiss, beheld a sight which greatly astonished him. In an open vehicle just in front, and which like that which he and Du Tremblay occupied, was unable to move forward, there sat two men who were also evidently in a great hurry, for they shouted to their driver to get on. One of them, dressed in white from head to foot, looked like a gentleman bound for his country seat; while the other, attired in a summer livery, and wearing a white cap with a silver band, was evidently a servant. This meeting had nothing so very peculiar about it, for the station yard was full of gentlemen with their valets. Only, Julien was particularly struck with the appearance of the man in livery. His build peculiarly recalled that of the odious M. Wassmann. And moreover, although his back was turned to Julien, the latter could plainly see that he wore a long pair of whiskers—tawny whiskers, which, when the sun shone on them, looked quite red; whiskers, shaped moreover like shark's fins, and which, in hue, colour, size and shape, reminded Julien of his recent adventures. On the day when he had seen M. Wassmann painting on the banks of the Marne, he had first espied him in much the same position as now, and had caught a similar view of his tawny whiskers which had looked precisely like those which the young advocate now beheld. Was it a simple freak of imagination that made Julien take a vague resemblance for perfect identity? He could not help putting this question to himself, and his curiosity was so keenly excited that he leant out of the cab to such a degree that Du Tremblay asked him laughingly if he had mistaken the paving stones of the yard for the waters of the Seine, and was desirous of trying a plunge.

Was it to be supposed, however, that M. Wassmann would wear a coat with brass buttons, and a cap with a silver band? Julien, who was not acquainted with the information given to the magistrate by Digonnard, could make nothing of it. However, he was anxious to make sure on the point, and he was about to open the cab door and alight, when the block suddenly came to an end, and the vehicle in front drove on. Julien, who was on the watch, saw it stop before the flight of steps opposite the waiting-rooms, deposit its "fares" on the first step, and then disappear under a side arch on the left hand side of the yard. The two men it had conveyed did not show their faces as they alighted, and they even went up the steps without once turning round, and speedily disappeared amid the crowd inside the station. Thus, La Chanterie's only reward for his efforts was a stiff neck. In his despair at his failure, he began shouting to the driver to push on, and in so furious a voice, that Du Tremblay said to him;

"Good gracious, my dear fellow, what the deuce are you up to? You'll wreck the ship—I mean the cab."

"Its nothing," muttered Julien, "I only thought I recognised——."

"Who? Saint-Avertin? That's no reason for going on like that; but don't alarm yourself, your antagonist won't take the 4.30 train like ourselves. What would the ladies say if Saint-Avertin were missing this evening at the circus, and at Mabilly? No, no, I know his programme. He'll sup at the Café Anglais, with his two seconds, birds of the same feather as himself, and to-morrow morning the blissful trio will post from Paris to the meeting place. You can quite understand they won't miss such a fine chance of doing things in style."

Then the fellow with all those fine names is really a fool after all?" said La Chanterie, absently.

"Of course, you must have found that out at the club. But I think I see Fabrègue over there, making furious signs to us from the top of the steps. Can we have missed the train?"

"Of course we have," said Julien, in a sulky tone; "you see that I did right to hurry the driver. These things seem planned to vex me," he added to himself.

The vision of the tawny whiskers still pursued him, and he would not abandon his fancies. Anyway he could not clear up his doubts, for he was only too right about the time; the train was missed by a long way. "Never mind, there's another in twenty-five minutes, and an express one too. So that we shall gain by the exchange," said Du Tremblay, who prided himself on his philosophy.

The two friends alighted, Julien carrying his travelling bag, and Du Tremblay the wrapper containing the swords. Their friend, Fabrègue, confirmed the news of the train's departure, and twitted them on their discomfiture pretending that their cab, in the middle of the yard, had looked like a skiff stranded on a sandbank, and that La Chanterie, at the window, had resembled a sea-sick Englishman, leaning over the boat's side to feed the fishes.

The man who made all these nautical remarks was a big, strapping fellow, a Languedocian by birth, and an architect by profession, who had served five years with the African contingent, in which he had reached the important rank of quarter-master. Rather older than most of his comrades of the Red Indian Club, he exercised a certain amount of authority over them, especially during their exploring expeditions on the banks of the two Parisian rivers, the Seine and the Marne. Fabrègue was the willing organiser of all these parties, and also the inventor of the queer nicknames by which the joyous troop called one another while on their tours. He and Du Tremblay had, of course, formed part of the expedition on the Marne during the previous month, when Julien had so unexpectedly found himself face to face with his uncle and had witnessed the capture of the poacher.

The train was going at full steam through the tunnel under the Place de l'Europe, and La Chanterie and his two seconds, being too late for it, were condemned to pace up and down the waiting room until admittance was granted to the platform. Fabrègue profited by this delay to explain the programme he had planned for the trip to the Isle of Croissy. "My young buffaloes," he said, with the volubility and amusing manner of a child of the South, "I have arranged everything, so that the evening preceding the battle shall not be deficient in amusement. Our rooms are retained at old Cabassut's, who fries gudgeon so well. We shall reach his house at six o'clock exactly; we will leave our bags and traps, give a look round the kitchen, and then set off for the water-side. It will be just the time for a bathe. We'll pull a stroke down the Seine up to seven o'clock, and as soon as we are dressed again we will betake ourselves to the *Frolicsome Gudgeon*, where we shall partake of Cabassut's hospitality. Eels and stewed rabbit, washed down with some white wine, which isn't at all bad; then —"

"I hope you didn't ask all the crew of the *Éperlan*," put in Julien, who had no especial wish to feast with his fellow-boatmen, and who, moreover, half thought that, under the circumstances, Fabrègue's programme was a little wanting in decorum.

"What do you take me for? Do you think I am going to propose taking

you to the Bougival ball on the evening before a duel? The deuce! a duel is a duel, and when a fellow wants to get up with a steady hand and eye, he ought to go to bed early. Besides, although it is well to put a good face on the matter, a man always feels glad to be left a little to himself on the night before an encounter of the kind."

"And to scribble a letter, in case of any accident," added Du Tremblay.

"We left in such a hurry, that I had no time to make any preparations," said Julien; "and I confess that I want to employ part of the evening in writing. If anything had happened to me, my uncle would never forgive me for going off to get killed without wishing him good-bye."

"And Mademoiselle de Brannes, too!" exclaimed Fabrègue, who was sometimes a little wanting in discretion; "but it's agreed and understood. After some slight refreshment, which we will take in common, you shall do as you like with your time. If Du Tremblay and I grow tired, we will fence a bit with the swords just to amuse ourselves. But listen to the finish of my programme. As soon as Aurora, with her rosy fingers——"

"Draw it mild, and say at four o'clock; it's clearer that way."

"At four o'clock, then, as you don't like mythology, old Cabassut's boat will be waiting for us, and will convey us to the island opposite, a spot which is just suitable for the duel. Having twice availed myself of it on my own account, I know it as well as I know the poop of the *Éperlan*. We shall of course be the first to arrive, and shall have the extreme delight of watching our opponent's triumphant passage across the river. It never does to be late in a matter of this kind. That's a principle of mine," gravely added the ex-quarter-master.

"You are quite right, and your plans suit me perfectly," said Julien. "Let's take our tickets now and set off, so that your plans may not undergo any unforeseen alteration."

"Talking of plans," resumed Fabrègue, "it was the discussion of Benedek's plans that caused all the quarrel, wasn't it? I didn't know that you were so susceptible on the question of strategy."

"Benedek's plans led my adversary to make some most impertinent remarks, which I put an end to pretty quickly."

"Yes, I know; you told him that he was a fool. That was pretty stiff, but perfectly right, and I'm not the one to gainsay it, for I learnt a long time ago what to think of the fellow."

"Then you already knew Saint Avertin?" asked La Chanterie, eagerly. He was all the more anxious to obtain some information respecting his adversary, as a curious suspicion had suddenly flashed upon his mind.

"Certainly, I know him," said Fabrègue, "and his seconds too. I'll tell you all about it on the road."

Julien restrained his impatience, and allowed the ex-quarter-master to take the tickets. The waiting-room was hardly the place for the young advocate to listen to the biography of his opponent, and however much he wished to be enlightened on the subject, he realised that it was best to wait for the departure of the train, and not to discuss so personal a subject till out of the hearing of all strangers. Luck favoured the trio, who found an unoccupied compartment, and at once climbed into it. "Well?" asked La Chanterie, as soon as the train began to steam out of the station and the friends were assured of no interruption—"Well, who is this Saint Avertin, whose name I never heard before?"

"Well, it would be a very funny thing if you had; the Saint Avertin part of his cognomen has only figured on his cards during the last year or so, and

even in the fast society which he frequents, people have not yet grown quite accustomed to it."

"Then his name really is not Saint Avertin?"

"Yes it is, only any number of people pronounce it Miraut."

"Come, Fabrègue, no joking. I am deeply interested in being correctly informed on this subject. What is the fellow's real name? Where does he come from? What does he do? Who are his relatives?"

"You're too fast. Stop a bit, and don't mix up your questions if you want clear answers. Be methodical, my good fellow. That's an excellent principle to go upon both in fencing and conversation."

"You are exaggerating its importance just now," said Julien, laughing, "and I should be very grateful to you to come to the point."

"I'm quite willing. You first of all want to know what name your opponent inherited from his forefathers, who were, I believe, vine growers in the neighbourhood of Blois. All right, this name was Miraut, neither more nor less."

"Miraut?" repeated Du Tremblay, who was fond of saying something jocular in the gravest possible manner; "why, the fellow must be descended from a sporting dog."

"Let's be serious," continued Fabrègue; "this Miraut is afflicted with the christian name of Achille, as you may have already seen on his card."

"Good! and how did he get the surname of Saint Avertin?" asked La Chanterie.

"I don't exactly know, but I have every reason to believe that, when an infant, he was put out to nurse in a village of that name, a circumstance which, as you must own, would give him every right to place himself under the protection of that saint."

"All right; now let us hear about his origin."

"His origin? you know it—son of a vine-grower, not a vine-grower himself."

"Your jokes are unbearable. He has a large fortune, then?"

"He has, or rather he had some seven or eight thousand francs a year when he first came to Paris, about four years ago."

"Then he has made money at the Bourse, or elsewhere?"

"Not at the Bourse, I fancy; elsewhere, perhaps. But what I am quite sure of is, that during the first three years that he knocked about the Boulevards he spent three-fourths of his capital."

"How can that be? He sups, and gambles, and bets on the races."

"Quite so; and you may at once say that he spends from fifty to sixty thousand francs a year."

"Where does he get them?"

"He alone could give you precise information on that point; but it is probable that he is very discreet. However, everyone knows that he has always been extremely lucky at cards."

"Then he is a professional blackleg?"

"No; first of all everyone can't become a cardsharpener—it's quite a natural gift to know how to cheat; secondly, blacklegs always end by being caught, and never has Monsieur Miraut—whether he is a Saint-Avertin or not—been caught or suspected of cheating."

"Well, then, what is his secret, for you won't persuade me that his run of luck comes by chance."

"By chance, no; but by a certain amount of skill, yes. He is expert in all kinds of games, and always arranges to play against novices, and against people who have dined too freely or already lost a good deal. It is a very paying proceeding, and is considered to be allowable."

"Very wrongly so, I think."

"And so do I; but to return to our young friend. At a club to which he belonged—previous to being admitted to yours—he invented the dodge of going to bed before nine o'clock at night, and getting up at four in the morning, so as to reach the gambling table fresh and rested. He only found some weary losers there, stupified by keeping such late hours and by a constant run of ill-luck. It's useless for me to add, that he always had the best of them, and never failed to finish them off."

"How abominable!"

"The most abominable thing out. But that does not prevent certain people from calling it 'profiting by one's advantage.' I simply call it 'robbing,' which is plainer and shorter language."

"And more appropriate. But speaking of clubs, just tell me how this rogue managed to get into Henri's club, where there are so many honourable men."

"Ah, my good fellow, there's the rub; it's a mystery such as you often come across in Paris. Miraut had no name to carry him through, so he coined one, and no one troubled to ascertain if he had any right to it. He had no fortune, and acted just as if he had a very large one. There is nothing like living on one's capital so as to throw dust in people's eyes, and thus make friends. Miraut has always paid his debts of honour, and has always carefully kept within the provisions of the law. He has become Saint Avertin without his right to the name being disputed. However, I must confess that all his skill would not have sufficed to admit him into good society if he had not managed to effect an entry by some chance which I know nothing of. For the last year or so there has been a great change in his mode of life. People who formerly didn't even bow to him now treat him in a friendly way. He has displayed his person in the drawing-rooms of some wealthy foreigners. He has even been seen patronising diplomatic fêtes. Nobody has ever thought much of him, but nobody has said anything particular against him. By the help of two or three college friends, he has ended by getting into your club."

"It's marvellous!" said Julien.

"And don't deceive yourself," answered Fabrègue. "He now has in the club plenty of friends who will maintain that he is the most worthy fellow on earth; and you would do very wrong if you took any exception as to his reputation or standing, so as to decline fighting a duel with him."

"I have no earthly wish to shirk this duel," said La Chanterie.

"I know that very well, but I should have been glad if I could have prevented it, for I know Monsieur Miraut, and I know that it's not a fair fight between him and you, as he will never risk anything but a sharper's skin; however, after due reflection I realised we had no allowable reason for a refusal to fight, and Du Tremblay agreed with me."

"Quite so," said the friend appealed to.

"You have acted for the best, and I thank you for it," exclaimed Julien. "Besides, rest assured I shall vigorously defend my skin as an honest member of society. But you, Fabrègue, where the deuce did you learn all this about the scamp?"

"Oh! my dear fellow, I picked up a little everywhere. You know architecture leaves me plenty of leisure time, and I employ it in going about into all sorts of sets, especially those in which I get most amusement. My poor aunt when she died left me a sufficient income to allow me to leave the 1st African Chasseurs, and merely build houses as a dilettante. I make use of my legacy to explore various grades of society, as the newspapers say. It is a

kind of geology of which I never tire, and which teaches me a good deal. It has enabled me to discover some curious specimens, unfortunately *not* fossils for Saint Avertin is quite a modern piece of goods. You ask me where I have met him? Why! at the theatres; out shooting; at Mabilley; with fast women; in the fencing-rooms; and, by the by, the gentlemen is a pupil of Pons, our foremost fencing-master. Oh! he isn't a pupil of the first water, but he knows enough for me to advise you to be on your guard. He parries badly, but he knows a few nasty thrusts fairly well."

"I will do my best," said Julien, calmly. He now knew pretty well all that he had wished to learn, and he let the conversation drop. The information supplied him by Fabrègue, had only served to increase his former suspicions, and his imagination ran riot more than ever, haunted by the idea that his opponent was an accomplice of M. Wassmann. He recalled, among other circumstances connected with the quarrel, the singular fact that the young fop, who had seemed rather the worse for liquor when he reached the club balcony, had suddenly become sober again after the exchange of cards.

While Julien was thus reflecting the train tore along, and after rushing through two stations, it drew up at that of Rueil, which was the nearest one to old Cabassut's hostelry. The three friends alighted from the train, and at once walked off towards the inn known as the *Frolicsome Gudgeon*. As a matter of course the suspicious whiskers of the man in livery were not seen again during the journey.

VII.

THE station of Rueil, where Julien and his seconds alighted, is situated at some distance from the village of that name. On the other hand, it is close to the Seine, which is spanned by the railway bridge, but a few hundred yards further on. On leaving the station, the friends did not follow the high road, but struck off along a path to their right, which crosses the fields and leads to the river. Just where it joins the road skirting the Seine the inn of the *Frolicsome Gudgeon* displays its modest whitewashed frontage and the bright green arbours of its little garden. Above the door there swings a sign painted by some wandering dauber, who has given way to various extraordinary freaks of colouring on this board, which is some three feet square. An apple-green gudgeon is to be seen capering about in deep blue water, as if it were deriding an angler who wears a scarlet waistcoat and yellow breeches. In the background a cook, dressed in white from head to foot, and holding a saucepan in his hand, watches the capering gudgeon with a grin on his face, as if desirous of intimating that these frolicsome capers will soon end in the frying-pan. The artist was, perhaps, actuated by a praiseworthy desire to express something philosophical in thus reminding the many frequenters of the place how short are the pleasures of life. Perhaps, however, he simply gave way to his fantastic ideas of colouring, and took pleasure in assembling within so small a space the most varied tints and boldest contrasts. At all events he painted the sky violet and the trees black, and whatever his purpose may have been, his work has certainly brought good luck to the owner of the establishment, for old Cabassut has made a fortune.

At the time we write of, when war had not yet ravaged the suburbs of Paris, his house had a tidy and inviting look to all such people as repaired on foot to examine the machine constructed at Marly for raising the water of the Seine. Moreover, few boatmen going up or down the stream were able to resist the seductions of the trim garden, where you could drink a bright clear

wine under the shade of the acacia trees ; and the boating men out for a long day's fresh-water cruise never disdained to cast anchor before the little hostelry. You often found there newspaper men out for a holiday, lovers in quest of solitude, and poets hunting for rhymes. Duellists also came now and again, swelling the number of customers, for a deal of fighting went on in the long woody islands, which extend down the river from Le Pecq to Chatou, and ever farther. Cabassut maintained the traditions of the old restaurants of the Bois de Boulogne, where in distant times landlords catered for duellists, just as nowadays they cater for wedding parties. They provided beds and bandages in the event of a serious result, and excellent lunches if the encounter ended merely in a few scratches, or was averted by a pacific "arrangement" ; and old Cabassut followed their example ; in case of need, moreover, the worthy fellow, who had once been in the army, gave a few fencing lessons to any novices who required his assistance, and he was in a position to supply provident patrons with horse pistols or with foils, from which the buttons had been removed. In case of necessity he would have also provided seconds.

Julien and his friends intended merely to have recourse to his kitchen department, which, moreover, enjoyed a great and well-deserved reputation. When they appeared on the river bank the landlord of the *Frolicsome Gudgeon* was smoking a pipe on the threshold of his establishment, and as soon as he saw them he bowed with mingled respect and familiarity.

He numbered Fabrègue and Du Tremblay among his very best customers, and La Chanterie was not unknown to him, though he boated less frequently than his comrades on the fine waters of Croissy.

"I have kept the two front rooms on the first floor for you, gentlemen," said the amiable inn-keeper. "At what time do you gentlemen wish to dine?"

"When it gets dark, Cabassut," said Du Tremblay. "Just now we only want your boat, to take a pull down the river and have a bathe."

"It's a fact, that with such heat, anyone prefers to take a bathe to sitting down to dinner. Besides, it will give you a good appetite for the fine carp, which was brought me only this morning from Poissy—a magnificent fish it is."

"Let's have the carp boiled, and look after the stewed rabbit," put in Fabrègue, who had always a weakness for the latter dish.

"And just take those parcels to our rooms," added Du Tremblay.

"Oh ! oh !" said the inn-keeper, feeling the wrapper which contained the swords, "we have a little business on, have we?"

"Just a little transaction, Cabassut ; oh ! quite a little one."

"Is it coming off this evening?"

"Ah, no ! How could anyone fight it out to-night in your parts, within two steps of La Grenouillère ? We don't want to amuse the society that collects there."

"Quite right. And there might be folks ready to fetch the gendarmes. So it's fixed for to-morrow morning?"

"At five o'clock precisely, my dear Cabassut."

"Good ; you shall be called at four, and François shall be waiting in the boat to row you over. When a man is going into action it's a mistake to row ; it spoils the steadiness of his hand. You will go to the same place as before, I suppose."

"Of course ! I only know one good spot, in the middle of the island of La Chaussée."

"Well, really you couldn't find a better. There are some tall poplars, which prevent anyone seeing you from the river banks, and a stretch of ground as

level as the floor of a fencing school. But I say, Monsieur Fabrègue, so you're always getting mixed up in something of the kind. Upon my word, when I received your telegram just now, I thought I could guess what your business was. Without indiscretion on my part, is it the same kind of case as last time, something to do with one of the ladies of the *Éperlan* ? ”

“ No, it's not I who am going to fight to-morrow,” broke in Fabrègue.

“ Nonsense ! ”

“ No, it's this gentleman,” added the Southerner, pointing to Julien.

“ Really ? so much the better. The gentleman will see what a nice place it is, and come back to see us again.”

La Chanterie, who was but indifferently affected by this interested invitation, did not trouble to reply, and Du Tremblay, realising that his friend took no pleasure in listening to old Cabassut's gossip, proposed that they should proceed without further delay to that salutary recreation, bathing. The boat was there, made fast to a stake, and the young fellows had only to descend the bank to reach it. They did so. Du Tremblay, who was a first-rate hand with the oars, undertook to row, and pulled the boat out quickly into mid-stream. It was agreed he should continue managing it, while his two friends were in the water, and that he should take his dip afterwards. Julien asked for nothing better than to plunge into the water, for he was dying of heat, and he also felt great need of corporal exercise to drive away the black thoughts which assailed him. Those carrotty whiskers, espied at the railway station in Paris, still haunted him, do what he would, and he began to think himself quite a fool to attach such importance to the shade and cut of a strangers hirsute adornment. He had certainly much better think about his duel, and while he was undressing he glanced at the island which his friend Fabrègue had selected for the encounter. It was the first one down stream, after the island spanned by the railway bridge, and the largest in sight. Up the river there is a bathing establishment, principally frequented by the weaker sex, and known in the gay world by the expressive and unpoetical name of *La Grenouillère*—the frogs' resort—while looking down the stream there are several shady deserted nooks which are suited in every respect to duelling. The scenery all around is delightful, and towards evening when the sun sinks behind the dense woods which cover the heights of Louveciennes and Marly, when the willows on the bank are mirrored in the stream, which is tinged with crimson by the glow of the sunset, you would think you were a hundred miles from the Boulevard des Italiens. Du Tremblay had let the boat drift with the current, and they were at some distance from the noisy spot where the various nymphs and tritons who had arrived from Paris by the last train were dabbling. Lower down, the banks of the island became silent and deserted, and the only persons Julien could see were an angler seated on a large stone, and a little farther off a couple of men, who were undressing, with the evident intention of bathing.

“ You see those poplars ? ” said Fabrègue, pointing towards a clump of trees exactly opposite to them, but on the other side of the island.

“ Yes,” replied La Chanterie, rather absently.

“ Well, it's just there that at daybreak to-morrow you will inflict a good sword thrust upon Monsieur Miraut, alias Saint Avertin.”

“ I'll do the best I can. Meanwhile I am going to try the water,” said Julien, diving in a style which would have won the admiration of amateurs.

Fabrègue followed close upon him, and after the orthodox time under water, they both came to the surface ; Fabrègue lower down the river and more in the centre, whilst Julien was nearer to the island. “ Delicious ! ” shouted the ex-quarter-master, striking out.

La Chanterie did not answer, for he was busy examining the two men whom he had seen undressing on the river bank, and who had now just entered the water a little distance lower down. One of them especially attracted his attention, for although his *occiput* was turned towards Julien, the latter perceived that he wore a large pair of reddish whiskers. Really these intermittent apparitions savoured of nightmare, and Julien, to satisfy himself as to the identity of the person who wore these fin-like whiskers, resolutely struck out towards their possessor.

The red-haired man swam with his back towards Julien, and swam like a seal, now on his side, now with only his forehead and nose out of water, and, whether by accident or intention, he never showed his face. His companion was floating, and freely displayed a flattish insignificant countenance, which Julien did not remember having ever seen before. If the whiskers, now displayed in the river, were the same as those which he had seen in the station yard, everything seemed to indicate that they did not belong to M. Wassmann, for the latter must have something else to do that day than to swim about the Seine. At all events this was the opportunity or never for Julien to rid himself of all his haunting will-o'-the-wisp fancies, and he put on a spurt, so as to pass the person he was watching, and get a good direct look at his face.

Just as he was about to come up with him, the man, still without turning round, suddenly dived, or rather let himself sink, under water with incredible precision and speed. Had he done it on purpose, and had he chosen the very moment intentionally when he saw that he was about to be overtaken? This did not seem probable, as the other bather continued to float along quietly with the stream without taking the least notice of the fact that a stranger was approaching.

"He will surely come up again presently," thought Julien.

And he began to swim gently against the stream, so as to be near at hand, and get a good look at the face of the diver when the latter came to the surface.

He was ready with watchful eyes, like a harpooner watching for a whale to show itself, when suddenly he felt one of his legs seized hold of from below. He gave a vigorous kick to free himself, but the grasp was so sudden and so very powerful that he could not break from it. He opened his mouth to shout for help, but his head went right under water before he could cry out. It seemed to him that an enormous weight hung from his ankles, and that an irresistible force was dragging him to the bottom of the river. He tried to struggle and to tread water with his feet, so as to give himself sufficient impetus to rise to the surface, but he did not succeed in doing so, and it seemed to him as if his lower limbs were garroted. He even thought he felt a tight cord cutting across his knees, and realised that he was lost. The blood buzzed in his ears, an iron hand pressed upon his temples, his chest swelled as he gasped for breath, and red flames hovered before his eyes. However, he was still quite conscious; his mind had even acquired extraordinary clearness of perception, and in the space of a few seconds all the events of his life passed before his mental vision, to disappear again with the same rapidity. It was just like a succession of lightning flashes on his brain. He once more beheld M. Wassmann's odious countenance, M. Jean's venerable features, and Gabrielle's sweet face. Then all became dark, and he ceased to think. His last sensation was that of a violent blow on the shoulders. He stretched out his hands, grasped mechanically at some object within his reach, and clung on to it with the energetic instinct of a drowning man. Then everything vanished from his mind; he had no impression of what happened afterwards.

It was not till an hour later that he recovered from his utter prostration, and when he regained consciousness he found himself comfortably installed in one of Cabassut's beds. Fabrègue and Du Tremblay were near him watching his return to life, and they had prepared various strengthening beverages for him. A large tumbler of hot wine and water and a huge bowl of broth steamed away on the mantelshelf. Julien's eyes fell upon various articles strewn about the room—articles which had evidently come from some box of appliances for the rescue of the drowned—rubbers, blankets, bottles of smelling-salts, half-burnt feathers, and so on, the sight of which reminded him in some degree of what had befallen him.

"Thank you, my friends," he said, in a weak voice. "So you have saved me——"

"Aha!" exclaimed Fabrègue; "so you are really alive. Do you know for the last twenty minutes we have heard you breathing as regularly as a child in its first sleep, and we dared not wake you up. But, as to thanks, you don't owe us any; they are due to old Cabassut, who lent us all these drugs and paraphernalia; and, besides, you really saved yourself."

"I still have only a very confused recollection of what happened," murmured Julien. "What did really occur to me?"

"Well, you happened to clutch hold of the root of an old willow tree, and you grasped it firmly, probably without knowing what you were doing; however, most miraculously you kept your head above water until I reached you, and I can assure you I had a hard job to make you relinquish your hold on the root; you held it as if you wished to tear it up. It was a good sign anyhow, and I knew directly that you had only fainted, for your heart was still beating—not very strongly certainly; still it was beating."

"How can I have nearly drowned myself like that?"

"As to that, deuce take me if I can tell, for you swim like a fish, and I can't make out your accident at all; I did not see it happen even; it was Du Tremblay who shouted out to warn me, and without him, upon my word!——"

"You will remember that I had remained in the boat," said Du Tremblay, continuing the explanation. "Fabrègue had shot away into mid stream, and you were going towards the island; I wondered if you meant to land, so I kept an eye on you, which was very lucky, for you suddenly disappeared like a bullet thrown into water. I at first thought you were amusing yourself by diving down and letting yourself drift, but when I saw that you didn't come up again I grew anxious; I pulled a stroke to larboard, and shouted to Fabrègue."

"And you may guess, my dear fellow, that I came along at double quick," said the Southerner. "We had as bad a ten minutes of it as you can fancy. You still didn't come up; I dived three times without finding you, and at last I began to fear that I should never see you again alive; however, at the moment when I was going to hunt for you along the bank, and Du Tremblay was drawing off his boots to spring into the water, what should I see, twenty yards below the place we had reached, but a hand clutching hold of an old stump, and some hair floating round a pale, or rather a green, face——"

"Then," said Du Tremblay, continuing the narrative, "we came up with you together, Fabrègue swimming, and I rowing; we got your hands off the tree, laid you down in the boat, and began to rub and pinch you——"

"And you'd never believe it, my dear Julien," interrupted Fabrègue, "there were two fellows—tradesmen, I fancy—bathing close to you, and they had certainly seen you sink, but instead of helping you they hastened away like a pair of ducks."

"Two tradesmen?" echoed the rescued man, raising himself in bed. "Ah! I had forgotten that scoundrel. It was he! It was Wassmann who——"

Julien did not finish his sentence. His two friends looked at him with astonishment, and he suddenly remembered that neither of them were aware of the fight he was carrying on with the red-whiskered man. It was not a suitable time for enlightening them on the subject, and he had the sense to hold his tongue.

"Do you happen to know one of them?" asked Fabrègue.

"No—no——"

"Oh! I should not compliment you on your acquaintances. It was in vain that I shouted to the brutes; I could not get them to lend a hand! What rascals! and I'll take my oath they saw you struggling in the water long before we did, and yet they would have left you to drown. The louder I shouted the faster they ran. It became almost ludicrous. They were in such a hurry to escape that they did not stop to dress, but fled across the island with their clothes under their arms."

"And you did not pursue them?" asked Julien, whom the account revived amazingly.

"Good Lord—no. We had something else to do than to chase such scamps as they were. Why, just think, we couldn't as yet tell whether you would ever rally, so I contented myself with treating them to some language they richly deserved. And don't alarm yourself, if I ever come across them——"

"Would you know them again?"

"I couldn't be quite certain; and yet I can't help fancying that I should recognise their ugly faces again. There was one especially, with red whiskers——"

"Perhaps he is still on the island," said Julien, jumping out of bed.

"Have you any intention of hunting him up in your present condition? You are on your legs again, I am glad to say; but no nonsense, please. You need to be well set up by a good dinner instead of rowing a cowardly imbecile. And then you've had plenty of quarrels to attend to as it is. You haven't strength left to fight Saint-Avertin, and it's not worth while having another job on hand."

"I certainly intend fighting to-morrow," exclaimed La Chanterie.

"There! I was sure of it!" echoed Fabrègue. "What a mad fellow you are! By Jove, you missed your vocation, and instead of choosing the legal profession, you ought to have enlisted in the Zouaves."

"Perhaps I shall come to that," muttered Julien, who did not augur well of the war. And he added in a louder tone, "Well! have you fellows any idea as to how I let myself sink under water so absurdly?"

"I thought you had the cramp," said Du Tremblay.

"I thought so too," added Fabrègue.

Julien did not answer. He was reflecting: "It was Wassmann swimming in front of me; it was Wassmann who dived, and caught hold of my legs; he wanted to drown me, to prevent my making use of the letter which he could not steal from me. It is time to finish matters with that man."

"It was cramp; I'm sure of it," continued Fabrègue, "and you are not the first to have been drowned like that. It's no use being a first-rate swimmer; a fellow can't be sure of avoiding such accidents. You've got over it, fortunately, so 'all's for the best.' Look sharp and dress, and then we'll go and dine."

It was, in fact, high time for Julien to dress, for he was merely wrapped up in the blankets in which his friends had rolled him, after an energetic rubbing. It was almost a miracle that their efforts had produced such good results so

speedily, and Julien's recovery really did them great honour. Without the help of any doctor, who could not, moreover, have been fetched in time to be of use, on account of the distance from the village, and with the sole help of the box of appliances which old Cabassut, the provident inn-keeper, kept on hand, Fabrègue and Du Tremblay had done as much as the most skilful practitioner could have accomplished. Thanks to them, La Chanterie, two hours after his accident, was so well set on his legs that he hardly felt any ill effects from his perilous adventure. At his age a fit of insensibility leaves no more unpleasant traces than a violent headache, and this slight inconvenience was more than compensated in Julien's case, by a really fiendish appetite. He was fully restored to strength, and was quite disposed to cross swords on the following morning. He felt that he should be all right after a few hours' good sleep.

However, his return to consciousness brought with it a revival of his old forebodings ; and nothing could shake his conviction that M. Wassmann had relentlessly pursued him during the last forty-eight hours. As it has been stated already, he even went so far as to suspect that Saint-Avertin had been subsidised by this miserable foreigner to kill him in a duel. Accordingly, while he was dressing and while his friends were trying to amuse him by their mirth, he swore to himself, first, that he would not go to bed before writing to the priest of Charly to beg of him to hand the investigating magistrate the letter he had entrusted to him, explaining in what its importance consisted ; and secondly, that he would himself inform the magistrate of all the incidents that had occurred within the last few days. By this course every eventuality would be foreseen. If he escaped uninjured from his brush with M. Miraut, he would personally renew his contest with this odious German ; and if, on the contrary, he was killed or received a wound likely to endanger his life, M. Jean would be a ready substitute to see the matter well through. He did not doubt but what the worthy priest would make every effort to discover the real culprit, and save the poacher. Having once formed these resolutions, La Chanterie felt quite disposed to regale himself with the good dinner which Cabassut had provided ; and a very merry meal it was. Fabrègue and Du Tremblay plied their forks and their wit simultaneously. They were delighted to see a comrade to whom they were so sincerely attached in such a good way to recovery, when but a little while before they had thought that it was all over with him. It is necessary to add that they had not the least idea of such real or imaginary dangers as threatened Julien, and they had no anxiety as to the engagement on the morrow, for they felt perfectly sure that their friend would easily run the little dandy through. So they enlivened the repast by varied discussions and amusing stories.

Fabrègue again related the story of the men who had fled naked across the island, and gave a lively description of the commotion their appearance must have caused among the ladies bathing in the neighbourhood. Du Tremblay discussed the angler, who had witnessed Julien's drowning, and who would certainly have tried to save him, if he had not had a bite at the very moment when he was about to spring into the water. The poor fellow had found himself between two stools—on one side his sentiments of humanity, and on the other his passion for fishing, and so he had stood motionless, his heart melting with compassion, but his eyes obstinately fixed on his float, which was dancing a saraband up and down in the wildest possible manner !

Julien could not help laughing over the grotesque perplexity of this disciple of the gentle craft, whom he remembered having seen seated on a stone at the margin of the stream ; however, he greatly regretted that his friends had not questioned him. If they had only known his name and abode, perhaps he could

have been found, and some information might have been obtained from him respecting the two runaway bathers, for after all, it was quite possible that he knew them. However, as matters stood, La Chanterie considered that he had better keep these thoughts to himself, and after the coffee and orthodox cigars, he returned to his room to write and go to bed early.

Having penned a note for M. Jean, which did not take him many minutes, he began to compose a letter to his uncle, which occupied him for a much longer time. In reality it was meant for his cousin, to whom he wished to bid good-bye, in case the duel had a fatal result for himself; and as he did not dare to write direct to her, he wished to express himself to M. de Brannes in such a way that Gabrielle should understand that his last thoughts had been of her. The composition of this epistle accordingly embarrassed him somewhat, and he covered his paper with erasures before finding expressions which would satisfy him. However, he at length succeeded in his task; and to this letter, in which he thanked the count very warmly for his fatherly kindness, and protested his keen and sincere affection for all his relatives, he annexed a will, by the terms of which he appointed Mademoiselle Gabrielle de Brannes his residuary legatee.

Having thus set his heart and conscience at ease, he thought that after such a day's work, he had a right to a little rest, and therefore went straight to bed. He slept as soundly as the great Condé did on the night before a battle, and, though the morrow could have nothing in common with the victory of Rocroy, this quiet sleep, between a danger just escaped and another pending, was sufficient proof that the young lawyer possessed an energetic character and constitution.

Daylight was just beginning to dawn, when his two friends knocked at his door. Julien was up in a minute, and his toilet promptly performed, though he paid more attention to his dress than usual, for he wished to show M. de Saint-Avertin that he was not a man to attire himself faultily any more on the duelling ground than in a drawing-room.

Du Tremblay and Fabrègue had also been careful to dress themselves suitably to the occasion, and no one would have guessed that these three gravely attired gentlemen belonged, at certain times, to the rather madcap Red Indian Club. As soon as La Chanterie had opened his window and breathed the fresh morning air, he discovered with great delight that he suffered no ill effects in connection with the mental and physical shocks which he had experienced on the previous day. His headache had completely disappeared; his limbs had regained their wonted suppleness and vigour; never, indeed, had he felt fitter in mind and body. Old Cabassut, when he saw him appear, with bright eyes, a fresh complexion, and a smiling mouth, was filled with admiration. Throughout his long career as a duellist's landlord, he had never yet waited on a champion so ready to brave death by the sword, when he had so nearly suffered death by water.

The boat was ready, as well as the lad who was to row it over. Although it was only half-past four, Julien proposed that they should set out. He wished to reach the appointed spot before his opponent arrived. His seconds raised no objection, and ten minutes after embarking they stepped on shore, a little below the spot where the last of the La Chanteries had so narrowly escaped drowning.

This time, the river bank was completely deserted. Not the least sign of a bather, not even a boat in sight; and as at this early hour, the ladies of the banks of the Seine are still in their first sleep, there was none of the merry hubbub which usually reveals the proximity of La Grenouillère, to boating

parties. Julien gazed around for the angler, in the vague hope that he might have resumed his seat on the stone, with early daybreak; but the disciple of Izaak Walton, remembering, no doubt, that he had been interrupted there on the previous evening, in the pursuit of his favourite pastime, had not thought fit to put in an appearance.

The trio crossed the island, Du Tremblay carrying the swords, and Fabrègue showing the way. The appointed meeting place could not have been better chosen. It was a clearing of some little extent, surrounded by trees, which seemed to have grown there for the express purpose of hiding the combatants from prying eyes. There was plenty of room for fencing, enough shade so that the sun's rays would not prove an inconvenience, and not sufficient grass to make the soil slippery.

"What do you say to the meadow of my choice?" asked Fabrègue, with a self-satisfied air.

"That it suits me perfectly," answered La Chanterie. "But are you quite sure that M. Miraut will know where to find us?"

"Oh! the spot is known well enough, and all the watermen of Chatou could show him the way. Besides, as we shall see him arrive on the opposite bank, from where we now are, there is nothing to prevent our hailing him."

"You're quite sure that he will come to this side of the island?"

"Of course, for to reach the other side, the only boat that I know of is old Cabassut's, unless, indeed, our party of dandies push as far as Bougival."

"Whatever their line of route may be, they don't hurry themselves, for five o'clock is just about to strike," said Du Tremblay.

"Supposing the rogue didn't come after all!" muttered Julien, whom the least incident threw into an appalling state of doubt.

"Oh, he'll come, sure enough," said Fabrègue, "for he considers himself a first-rate fencer; and, besides, he, perhaps, fancies that as you are an advocate, you have never held a sword. If he knew, however, what a clever swordsman you really are, I wouldn't answer for his coming up to the scratch."

"After all, he is not yet late," added Du Tremblay.

"And as we have plenty of time," continued the ex-quartermaster, "we will lie down on the turf, and smoke one or two cigars, pending these gentlemen's arrival."

Julien had no objection to offer to this plan. He sat down at the foot of a tall poplar, and dreamily gazed at the scenery before him, which was very unlike the landscape visible from old Cabassut's windows.

The right bank of the Seine, below the two bridges of Chatou, is bordered by high terraces, behind which rise several coquettish-looking villas, some three or four of which might pass for châteaux. Their pseudo-Babylonian style of architecture does not produce a disagreeable effect, but there is nothing particularly rural about it. On this side of the river more walls are to be seen than trees, and more stones than grass. On the island, on the other hand, vegetation is luxurious, and the grass grows thick, perhaps because it is less often trodden under foot by excursionists from Paris. The feet of Parisian belles are specially adapted to walking on asphalt, and the heels of their tiny boots scrunch up the wild daisies in the fields.

The morning was delightful; the sun, which had just risen, gilded the rugged trunks of the poplar trees, and lent a silvery sheen to the drops of dew hanging from the tips of the leaves. You could hear the birds warbling among the lofty branches, and the gurgling of the water, which the morning breeze lapped gently against the pebbles on the shore. Looking on so peaceful and refreshing a picture, Julien momentarily forgot that he had come here to fight a

duel with a fool ; and his fancy wafted him to another water-side scene, that which had presented itself when a mere chance, which he now bitterly regretted, had brought him face to face with the poacher Robert.

Since that unlucky meeting, as he was obliged to confess, his life had been entirely changed. He who previously passed as a perfectly happy man had been mixed up in the most disagreeable adventures. His hitherto uneventful existence had come suddenly to an end, and he had abruptly passed from a state of perfect peace to one of turbulent agitation. He now walked through life in the midst of snares. People forced his furniture, tried to rob him, and drown him ; he could no longer move a step without being involved in a quarrel, or caught in some trap. He was reduced to perpetual ruminations on dark plots, and had to wear out both mind and body in inventing defensive precautions.

To a man accustomed to live openly and carry his head erect this was most frightful torture. Even his love affairs with his cousin suffered by all this trouble. Prior to the gamekeeper's murder, Julien had quietly allowed himself to fall in love with Gabrielle ; he had felt pretty sure that she loved him in return, and he did not see any great obstacle to their future marriage. The shot that had killed poor Michel, bursting on this delightful dream of happiness like a thunder-clap in a cloudless sky—that terrible shot had been the signal for a tempest to rise in the heart of Mademoiselle de Brannes. The gentle, timid young girl, so recently freed from the restraint of convent life, had suddenly given way to romantic ideas, and her head had become filled with fancies of captives released from their persecutors, and similar chivalric deeds of valiant knights. She had imposed on her faithful cavalier a most perilous task, and had subjected his valour to the most desperate trials.

Poor Julien did not shrink from the disagreeableness or the dangers of the struggle, but as he was endowed with great tact and a keen sense of the fitness of things in general, he began to see the absurd side of the enterprise in which he had engaged, solely to please Gabrielle. This Quixotic behaviour in furtherance of so vulgar a cause seemed really a little ludicrous, and, in fact, it was not the duty of a well-bred man to sacrifice his peace of mind and body so as to prove the questionable innocence of a poacher, who was not only accused of this one crime, but had undoubtedly been guilty of several other misdeeds. M. de la Chanterie had always lived among a set of people who greatly dislike to be mixed up in criminal trials, or to play the part of heroes of romance ; he therefore felt as if he had somewhat committed himself by indulging in such eccentric conduct.

Why was it that these sensible but refrigerating ideas troubled him now for the first time, on the island of Croissy, at the very moment when he was about to crown his series of strange adventures by a desperate duel ? It was certainly not because he was afraid ; only night brings counsel, and the matutinal hours are often favourable to wise reflections. He was roused, however, from his reverie by Fabrègue saying :

"I hear bells jingling in the direction of Chatou ; our men are coming."

"And there is the boat from La Grenouillère crossing the stream to fetch them," added Du Tremblay.

"Let us rise up to receive them," said Julien, blithely. "We must do all honour to the noble lord of Saint-Avertin."

"You must also think of all you want us to do ; have you any orders to give us ?" answered the ex-quartermaster.

"Only one. If any misfortune befalls me, I beg one of you to start at once for Charly, and deliver these two letters, one to my uncle, the other to the priest of the village, whose name is Monsieur Jean."

"All right!" answered Fabrègue. "Du Tremblay will see to it; he has a greater vocation than I have for diplomatic service; but I sincerely hope that there will be no cause for conveying your correspondence to its destination. If you are only careful you won't get a scratch, and you will give Miraut a good lesson."

"I hope so too, but it is always prudent to put one's affairs in order."

"By the bye, are you very anxious to kill Miraut?"

"Certainly not; I have enough worry just now without wanting to burden my conscience with manslaughter."

"And besides, that always creates a lot of bother. The law takes the matter up, and to avoid detention in prison, a fellow has to rush off to Belgium! Just give our dandy a little scratch on the arm or shoulder; that will be enough to teach him politeness."

"I will try to do so, but you know as well as I do that on the duelling ground it is impossible always to do as you like."

"No doubt it is; only remember what I told you about his little game. He fences well, is on the watch for low extrications and seagoon feints, but his parades are weak, and he lacks alacrity in the parry and thrust. Attack him boldly, press him so as to make him retreat, and don't spare straight thrusts. I know these grand gymnasium fencers well; when this fellow once sees the point of a sword within six inches of his eye he won't feel so easy."

"Here they are," interrupted Du Tremblay.

In fact a carriage drawn by four post horses, two of which were ridden by postillions, was now seen approaching the river's bank, creating a great noise. Fabrègue's predictions were being realised. It would have been difficult to imagine a more noisy arrival. The horses neighed, their bells tinkled, the whips of the postillions cracked, and it would not have taken much for the very gentlemen, lounging on the carriage seats, to applaud themselves. All this showed deplorable want of taste, and was quite worthy of the fool who had renounced his father's name, to cut a figure as a nobleman among women of equivocal reputation. The grotesque hubbub had fortunately not attracted anyone's attention, for the Paris cits who spend the summer at Chatou are not particularly partial to seeing the sun rise. M. de Saint-Avertin and his seconds alighted from their carriage with the easy nonchalance of men who had spent a jovial night, and embarked in the boat waiting for them, accompanied by a servant in a showy livery, who carried an oblong parcel in his hand.

"They bring their own swords," said Du Tremblay. "You know it is agreed that we shall draw lots as to whose weapons are to be used."

Julien made a gesture of indifference, and threw away his cigar, so as to meet his opponent with the orthodox gravity of such occasions.

The arm of the Seine was not very wide, and Saint-Avertin, who had seen the three friends from afar, soon landed with his companions at the foot of the tall poplars. The dandy did not look at all afraid, though his eyes were sunken, and his face very flushed, but his two friends were not over steady on their legs. Moreover, they did not seem to have much experience in duelling matters, for they let Fabrègue direct all the preliminary business. A coin was tossed up, and chance favoured Julien as to the choice of swords. The servant was stationed beyond the clearing to signal, if need were, the approach of any interferer coming from another part of the island. The ferryman kept a lookout on the river in his boat, and each side being of opinion that all explanation was superfluous, all that remained was to commence the fight.

Fabrègue, in his capacity as an ex-quartermaster, was naturally directed to take the arrangement of affairs. He selected the ground, marked out the

places, taking care that neither of the combatants should have the sun in his eyes, and measured the swords in presence of Miraut's seconds, who had seemingly resigned themselves to taking but a passive part in the business. They, however, tried to give themselves knowing airs, one of them by grunting his approval after each operation, the other by giving vent now and again to short phrases of imaginary English. Fabrègue looked at them askance more than once, and even openly shrugged his shoulders ; but these gentlemen seemed quite determined not to lose their temper.

As to Saint-Avertin, his attitude was sufficiently becoming. Leaning against the trunk of a poplar tree, with an utterly expressionless face, and his arms crossed over his chest, he awaited the termination of the preparations with an air of indifference which was certainly well assumed, if it was not real. It must be owned that Julien seemed much less calm. He stamped up and down with evident impatience, and often passed his hand across his forehead, as if to chase away some thought which worried him. Fabrègue kept his eye on him, and as he knew him to be particularly plucky, he was much astonished to see such signs of uneasiness, or at any rate embarrassment. He ended, however, by attributing this agitation to anxiety to finish with it all, and hastened over the necessary preliminaries. The two opponents having been informed that everything was in readiness, doffed their coats, whereupon the weapons were handed to them. They now merely had to cross swords and await the signal to commence, when to Fabrègue's great stupefaction, Julien began to speak, instead of putting himself on guard.

"Sir," he said abruptly to his enemy, looking him steadily in the face, "before beginning I wish to ask you a question."

"What is it, sir?" said Saint-Avertin, with an astonished and somewhat satirical look.

It may be guessed that he half expected that La Chanterie was about to propose an arrangement.

"Do you know Monsieur Wassmann?" inquired Julien, brusquely.

"Eh! what is the meaning——?" stammered the little dandy, blushing to the tips of his ears.

"Do you know him, yes or no?"

"Excuse me, sir; I don't understand your question, and do not consider myself bound to answer it."

However, while M. Miraut thus spoke, he turned deadly pale, and though he affected a disdainful and indifferent tone, he could not conceal the fact that this question thrown right in his teeth had greatly disturbed him. But there was someone else present who was even more amazed than he was and this somebody quickly came to his aid. Fabrègue had leapt with astonishment at the first word his friend had said, and he could not understand how a fellow for whom he had answered as he would for himself failed to observe one of the most elementary rules of duelling, which formally forbids any talking between the combatants when they are armed for the contest. He vainly tried to remember, as an old African soldier, any precedent for such an enormity, and, finding none, approached Julien and whispered to him: "What are you thinking of, dash it! gossiping like that? You must not do that sort of thing, my dear fellow, you will have everyone laughing at us."

"I know all that I wanted to know," said La Chanterie aloud. And he added, turning towards his adversary: "We can now begin."

Fabrègue, delighted to see his friend remember himself, at once crossed the swords, exclaiming,

"Right, gentlemen!"

Julien was the first to attack. He had the advantage of height over Miraut, who was hardly tall enough to serve in the infantry, and who besides did not appear very strong. The beat and thrust seemed to Julien to be the best lead, and, as his comrade, Fabrègue, had advised him, he commenced by four or five thrusts delivered with uncommon energy. They produced the result foretold by the ex-quartermaster, that is to say they compelled the little dandy to retreat, but they were parried with great skill. La Chanterie soon realised that if his opponent had no very brilliant execution, he fenced in a pretty safe style; his parry-and-thrust was always rather weak, but well judged, and, in fact, he might prove a formidable antagonist if time were given him. He evidently relied on tiring Julien out, while he himself remained on the defensive, leaving nothing to chance, and awaiting the moment when fatigue, or a false movement of his opponent, would afford an opportunity for some dangerous thrust, which he doubtless held in reserve, and which he meant to plan out during the earlier skirmishing.

It was the manoeuvre of a skilful spadassin, and Julien, who at once guessed it, was careful to be on the watch. He increased the energy and precision of his attacks, delivering thrust after thrust, and charging with a fury which did not after all impair the correctness of his style. Fabrègue, who watched the contest with the eye of a connoisseur and the solicitude of a devoted friend, was simply transported with admiration. Du Tremblay, less enthusiastic, frowned slightly, and did not appear so sanguine as to the ultimate result. Saint-Avertin's two seconds, sobered by this exciting spectacle, were probably not very easy, for they constantly exchanged glances.

However, no advantage was discernible on either side. M. Miraut had retreated as far as he could, and was getting blown, but he still defended himself, and did not allow himself to be touched; La Chanterie still pressed him determinedly, although he began to feel tired. Fabrègue, as umpire, finally considered it was time to put an end to this bout, which had lasted much longer than usual. So he extended the cane with which he was provided as an insignia of his office, and the swords were at once lowered.

The opponents profited by the interruption to resume their places on the ground where the engagement had commenced, and while they rested for a few minutes, Du Tremblay, who was perfectly cool and composed, observed them closely, and he thought he discerned evil intentions in the cunning glance of Saint-Avertin. The latter had evidently kept his most dangerous thrusts for the end, and thought he would make short work of Julien. La Chanterie, however, far from appearing discouraged, showed a most animated face and sparkling eyes, foreboding a more terrible assault even than the last had been. The question was, would his strength belie him too soon, for Miraut would probably manoeuvre with the same prudence as before, and retreat as far as possible. Fabrègue half regretted that he had suspended the contest, as, at the very moment when he had given the signal for a pause, the dandy had been driven back against a poplar tree, and consequently could no longer retreat, so that there had been a good chance of La Chanterie nailing him to the trunk. However, when a man has undertaken to act as umpire, he must show perfect equity, and Fabrègue was not a man to fail in loyalty, even in the interest of his best friend.

Wishing to repair as far as he could, whatever wrong he had done to Julien, he arranged that the rest should not be a long one. In a few appropriate words, he let both opponents understand that it was to their interest to proceed as quickly as possible to the second bout, and by mutual consent, after three minutes' interruption, they again placed themselves on guard. It was

soon evident that La Chanterie now meant to finish matters, for scarcely were the swords crossed, than without amusing himself with extrications or feints, he cut M. Miraut's sword so violently that it broke in two. At the same time he lunged out and would certainly have transpierced his adversary had his thrust been a little higher and less swift. Unfortunately, the two movements were almost simultaneous, and his wrist came upon the broken point of his opponent's sword, and was pierced right through, the fragment of the blade remaining in his arm. The dandy had not failed to retreat afresh with his usual caution, so that after this short and decisive bout, the two combatants found themselves some three feet distant from each other; Miraut, the stump of a sword in his hand, and quite bewildered by the unexpected turn that things had taken, and Julien, his arm transpierced by a triangular blade, which protruded fully two inches.

For a moment there was general stupefaction. Then the pain made Julien drop his sword and he staggered forward. Du Tremblay caught him in his arms and supported him while Fabrègue drew the steel fragment from his wrist. Blood flowed abundantly but without any intermittent jets. By a miracle, the main artery had not been severed. The ex-quartermaster then bound the arm tightly with his handkerchief to stop the bleeding, and he was cheering the wounded man with some kindly words, when M. de Saint-Avertin approached with his mouth pursed up, and commenced the usual phrase, as follows:—

"I hope, gentlemen, that everything has occurred conformably with honour, and that you are willing——"

"Go to the devil!" exclaimed Fabrègue, in a thundering voice.

M. de Saint-Avertin considered it as good as said and made his bow without adding another word. To see him slink away like this without flourish of trumpets or beat of drum, one could have sworn that he had just executed some commissioned task, and was delighted to have accomplished it so easily. His two seconds, still dumb, followed him with military precision—it was the only thing at all military about them—and the liveried servant, who had softly approached to see the fighting, carried off his master's swords which were still packed up, as no use had been made of them.

Fabrègue let the dandies go upon their way without saying a word of all he had upon his heart. He was too uneasy as to La Chanterie's condition to try and pick a quarrel with Miraut, much as he would have liked to do so.

And in fact, although no important organ had been injured, Julien's wound might be followed by serious consequences. The flesh was very much torn in one part where several veins met, and with the July heat lockjaw was greatly to be dreaded. The blade having passed between the two bones of the forearm must have just shaved the radial artery, and from this there might arise further perils, momentarily suppressed by a clever ligature. In short, poor Bold Buffalo was in a very bad way, and the result of this duel seemed to be the crowning complement of his many misadventures.

However, he bore his sufferings with great courage, and to see him walk off leaning on Du Tremblay's arm one would never have guessed that he had already been half drowned on the previous evening.

The walk across the island was both slow and painful, and as the trio entered the boat which was to row them across to the *Frolicsome Gudgeon*, they could hear the distant crack of the whips of the postillions who were celebrating in their own fashion Saint-Avertin's triumphant return. On the side of the vanquished the passage across the Seine was both sad and silent. Julien clenched his teeth and said nothing. Fabrègue and Du Tremblay only exchanged glances, judging that conversation by word of mouth would be

superfluous. Old Cabussut was the first to break the ice. He was standing on the bank, where, ever since their departure he had smoked pipes innumerable waiting to learn the result; and now, seeing his client come back with his arm to all appearance seriously injured he gave way to warm and loquacious expressions of sympathy, offering to fetch a surgeon from Bougival, to put his horse to, to take the wounded man back to Paris, or to apply an ointment of his own composition to the wound, which ointment, so he declared, had worked a wonderful cure on the shoulder of a journalist, who a short time previously had been wounded in a duel on the island.

Fabrègue put a stop to all this chatter by telling him pretty sharply to hold his tongue, and Julien declared that he simply wished to start for the station and catch the first train to Paris. He had but little confidence in the plasters of an innkeeper, or in the talent of suburban practitioners and he was desirous of reaching home and placing himself in the hands of his usual medical attendant.

This was evidently the right thing to do, and the proposal of an immediate start was in no wise opposed by his two friends. Du Tremblay undertook to settle the innkeeper's bill, whilst the wounded man, leaning on Fabrègue's arm, walked slowly towards the station. On arriving there, and while awaiting for the train to come up, the industrious Southerner found means of converting his necktie into a sling, which he tied round Julien's neck, so that he could rest his arm in it. He also procured a jug of cold water, so as to be able to bathe the wound during the journey, and, in fact, managed so well, that La Chanterie was almost as ably cared for as if he had taken the precaution to secure the attendance of the most skilful member of the faculty.

The energetic fellow was still sufficiently self-possessed, not to excite the curiosity of strangers, and the journey was accomplished without any one remarking the arm in the sling, and the perpetual bathing. It also chanced that after the first few moments, Julien was pretty free from pain. Not only did he bear without complaint the oscillation of the railway carriage, and the rough shaking each time that the train stopped, but he emerged little by little from the torpor that always follows upon a severe injury. At Nanterre he began to smile, and at Asnières he already jested on his want of skill. This gaiety augured well. He laughed at Du Tremblay, who had been at first seriously alarmed, and made Fabrègue talk more than ever.

"It will be nothing at all," exclaimed the Southerner; "I know your constitution well; you will get off with the bother of having your cravat tied by your servant, and of writing with your left hand, for a month or six weeks. However, how did you manage to get hurt like that just at the very moment when you were going to spit Saint-Avertin like a lark?"

"I can't tell myself; I was irritated, and wanted to finish the business. I acted too hurriedly. Besides, I had no great inclination to kill the fellow. Perhaps I shall want him later on."

"What are you saying? You want a rogue like that? I hope neither you nor I ever will have anything to do with him; that is, unless I find the opportunity to give him the correction he so richly deserves. However, I fancy he'll keep out of my way. He must have been horribly afraid of you just now, for you led him a pretty dance, and he won't be in a hurry to begin again so soon; he is too much of a coward."

"All the same he's a very fair hand at fencing, and I don't think you did him justice when you told me yesterday that he didn't know how to parry."

"Pooh! he has keen eyes and a certain dexterity of wrist; but that's nothing when a fellow lacks pluck, and as a proof of it, if he had had more coolness, and not been afraid for his own skin, he would have pricked you two or three times."

"That's quite possible, for I wasn't my own master, and when once a fellow gets angry he is off his guard."

"You were in a temper, were you? There really was no reason for it, unless you were angry at the way he answered your question when you asked him if he knew a certain Monsieur Glousman—Grasman—or some such name. And, by-the-bye, why the dickens did you question him about his acquaintances just as you were commencing the bout? You know as well as I do that it is against the rules."

"Yes, yes, I was in the wrong, but I had my reasons," said La Chanterie, in the tone of a man who is determined not to explain himself any further.

Whatever wish Fabrègue might have to know the motive of his friend's voluntary infraction of the quelling code, he felt that this was not the moment to urge it. So he said nothing more on the subject, and the conversation dropped. Julien, moreover, was again in great pain, and it was time for the train to stop. Outside the terminus Fabrègue leapt into a cab to go and fetch a doctor, while Du Tremblay helped the injured man into another vehicle, and saw him home.

On reaching the door of the apartment in the Rue de Verneuil great was M. de la Chanterie's surprise to find his valet Laurent struggling with a woman dressed like a peasant of the neighbourhood of Paris. This obstinate country-woman seemed determined to enter the rooms to speak, so she said, "to the nephew of Monsieur le Comte," and pretended that she was the bearer of a most important letter. In vain had Laurent answered that his master was away from home; she insisted that Parisians were never up so early, and that she wouldn't leave without executing her commission.

Julien arrived just in time to settle the difference. The woman recognised him and began to address him by name; and Julien, after some little hesitation, remembered that he had sometimes seen her at the Château of Chasseneuil on various occasions when she had come to visit her cousin, the keeper Michel.

The messenger was, indeed, no other than Jacqueline Ledoux, and after recriminating against the valet, who had dared to keep the wife of a Charly Municipal Councillor at the door, she drew from her basket a letter which La Chanterie had to open with his left hand. It was signed by M. Jean, and ran as follows:—"Sir,—If you can come this morning to Charly your presence will greatly serve the cause of the accused man in whom we are both so deeply interested, and I particularly desire to speak with you as soon as possible, respecting a matter which has come to my knowledge. It is impossible for me to leave the parsonage to-day, and if you will kindly honour me with a visit you will be doing a good action, and at the same time infinitely oblige your faithful servant."

The perusal of this letter at once made Julien forget that he was wounded and in great pain, and that Fabrègue would soon arrive with a doctor to dress his arm.

"My dear fellow," he said to Du Tremblay, drawing him on one side, "I've received some news which obliges me to start at once for Charly, and I beg of you——"

"Are you mad?" replied Du Tremblay, "or do you wish to lose your arm? To travel any further by rail, in your present condition, would be attended by very great risk indeed."

"I think you exaggerate, but even if I thought that I was risking my life, I should go all the same."

"What in the world has happened at Charly then? Has your uncle had a seizure? or has Mademoiselle de Brannes suddenly fallen ill?"

"Nothing of that sort, I am glad to say, but, nevertheless, I must go."

"Confound it! At any rate wait till Fabrègue brings the doctor to examine your wound, and see if no hemorrhage is to be feared. He will bandage it up properly for you, so that you can travel without fear of accident, since you are mad enough to set off, instead of going to bed."

"There is a first-rate doctor at Charly. I will call him in and he will dress my wound splendidly."

"And suppose you bleed to death in the train? It will be pleasant for your uncle and charming cousin if you are carried dead or unconscious to the Château of Chasseneuil."

This argument seemed to make some impression upon Julien, and for a moment he seemed to hesitate. But he soon continued in a resolute tone. "No, no, I shan't die, I'm sure of it. And it's almost better for me to make the journey before my wound has had time to get inflamed; if I defer the matter, I shall perhaps be obliged to stay here. Laurent," he added to his servant, "go and see if the cab which brought us is still outside, and tell the driver to wait for us."

"I suppose, sir," said Jacqueline Ledoux, "that I can go away now as I have performed my commission?"

"Yes, and I am much obliged for your bringing me the letter so expeditiously."

"Oh, there was no fear of my dawdling on the way; his reverence bade me come straight here, and he is such a worthy man that I shouldn't have heart to trifle with his instructions. Would you believe it, sir, he has begun to give Marcel lessons——"

"Who is Marcel?"

"A child from the Foundling Hospital, whom we took to our own home——"

"And whom M. Wassmann almost ran over on the Place de la Bastille. I remember the story now; it happened on the very day when poor Michel——"

"Ah! don't mention it! When I think that if it hadn't been for that unlucky business, I should never have missed the train, and should have had time to show Michel the writing I had received by post, I can never forgive myself."

"You have never found out where the letter came from?" asked Julien, excitedly.

"No, upon my word, no; and I have not even the least idea. My man said it might be that the letter was written by a street walker, some sweet-heart of that ruffian Robert's, and that is quite likely too, for the postman remembers that there was the Paris post-mark on the envelope which I was silly enough to lose."

"Your husband is wrong in his opinion, my good woman; but just tell me, don't you live close to a café kept by a Mademoiselle Rose?"

"My neighbour, sir; she is a most deserving person, most tender-hearted, I assure you! She is so soft-hearted, indeed, that the least thing gives her a turn. Just fancy that on the evening when Michel was killed, she was very nearly taken ill over it, and since she had to attend before the magistrate she has had several nervous attacks, and is wasting away to such an extent that she looks as thin as an old vine prop."

Julien's eyes sparkled. He was thinking to himself : "Supposing it were remorse for having committed perjury !" And he determined to inquire of M. Jean concerning the conduct of the landlady of the Café du Grand-Vainqueur.

"Upon my soul, I think he must have lost his wits," muttered Du Tremblay to himself, stupefied at hearing Julien chatter away to an old woman, instead of thinking of his wound, which must be causing him awful pain.

Just then Laurent came back to say that the cab was at the door.

"If you would only wait ten minutes," observed Du Tremblay, "Fabrègue would be back, and you could get the doctor to look at you before you leave."

"No, no ; I should miss the train, and that would delay me another hour," exclaimed La Chanterie. "I am off now."

"At any rate, let me go with you ; you might come to grief on the way, or have a fainting fit, and it is indispensable that you should have someone to attend to you."

"No, thank you. Excuse my saying this. But I must really go quite alone to Charly and you would only be in my way."

"All right," muttered Du Tremblay, rather irritated. "I will stay here to see the doctor. Do me the kindness to take the letters you entrusted me with. I am delighted not to have to deliver them."

Julien, ashamed that he was forced to repay his friend's devotion so ill, and not knowing quite what to say, took the two letters, compiled the previous evening, from Du Tremblay's hands and followed the old woman Ledoux, who had now reached the door.

"Shall you come back to-night ?" shouted his friend.

"Yes, unless I am kept at my uncle's house," replied Julien as he rapidly crossed the court-yard.

Du Tremblay was quite right ; this expedition was a mad one under the circumstances, and La Chanterie knew it well. But his excitement precluded sober thoughts and urged him on to insane conduct. M. Jean's letter had worked upon his imagination, and he imagined at first that the worthy priest must be awaiting him with full proofs of M. Wassmann's rascality. This hope agreed so well with the schemes he had formed during the last forty-eight hours, that he was anxious to verify it. He set out with a fixed determination to tell the priest all about the two attempts at theft—one at his house, the other on his person, together with the drowning scheme, and the duel, and to beg his assistance in bringing these matters before the investigating magistrate. He considered that the magistrate would not refuse this time to issue a warrant for the arrest of the abominable plotter of so many criminal acts.

This thought helped him to endure the fatigue of the journey, but did not prevent him from feeling frightful pain. His wrist swelled considerably on the way, and the swelling reached the hand, the skin of which turned livid. At last he suffered such frightful agony, that he needed superhuman courage and unheard-of efforts to prevent himself from fainting. When the train drew up at the Charly railway station, Julien's strength was quite exhausted, and yet he had to go some distance on foot, as the parsonage was situated at the other end of the village. He summoned all his courage, and quickly walked out of the station, to avoid any explanation with the railway officials who knew him, and who would not have failed to ask him, why he wore his arm in a sling, and was in such a desperate hurry to get on.

To the pain he suffered was added the fear that he might meet someone

belonging to the château on the way; and this would have greatly bothered him, for he wished to tell his uncle privately about the circumstances of the duel, and he particularly desired to avoid frightening Gabrielle. However, chance favoured him; he traversed Charly from one end to the other without being obliged to answer any indiscreet question. The only person he recognised was Digonnard, standing on the threshold of his shop, with the most majestic expression of countenance. As a matter of course the independent-minded chemist took good care not to bow to M. de Brannes's nephew; his red cap, embroidered by Madame Digonnard's lovely fingers, was not raised from his pointed skull. However, he carefully watched Julien for a long way down the street, and the young fellow realised, that ten minutes later every inhabitant of Charly would be made acquainted with his arrival, and the unusual manner in which he carried his right hand.

This was an additional reason for hurrying on to the parsonage. Julien made a last effort, and finally arrived at his destination. He found the door wide open, for the good priest's house was, like his heart, always accessible to those who stood in need of it. Julien went down a passage and reached the garden, where he espied M. Jean walking along reading his breviary. The priest on seeing his visitor, hurriedly shut his book, and came towards him with open arms. "Ah! sir," he exclaimed, "how much I thank you for coming, and how greatly astonished you will be when I show you the singular discovery which has been made in the Bélière woods."

"A discovery in the Bélière woods!" exclaimed Julien.

"Yes, yes, you shall see it in a moment; you will be very much surprised," said M. Jean. "But what is amiss with you? Ah! good heavens! your hand enveloped in bandages, and your arm in a sling—you are wounded?"

"Slightly—I hope so at least—you were saying that this discovery——"

"I will show it to you directly; just now you must rest yourself, my dear child; you are almost fainting; in heaven's name! what has happened to you?"

While thus speaking the good priest pushed forward a garden chair, on which he made M. de la Chanterie seat himself. The young fellow really had the greatest need of care and rest. "Thank you, your reverence, it's really nothing," he murmured.

"And to think that Geneviève is not at home to go and fetch Dr. Minard!" said M. Jean, softly, on seeing Julien close his eyes and sink back in the chair.

Fortunately, the worthy priest was accustomed to tend the ills of the body as well as those of the soul, and he knew exactly what to do to prevent a fainting fit. He hastened to his study, on the ground floor of the parsonage, took up a little medicine chest, which he kept in reserve for occasions of this kind, and promptly returned to the invalid. His old servant, Geneviève, who had gone marketing, returned at that very moment, and he met her in the passage. "The doctor!" he called out to her; "go at once and fetch the doctor, and bring him back here with you. If he has gone out look for him in the village, find him, and tell him to come here without losing an instant."

Whilst Geneviève put down her basket and rushed quite scared into the street, M. Jean made Julien inhale some smelling salts, and the young advocate soon began to rally. Then, without waiting for him to regain consciousness entirely, the curé carefully unfastened the hastily arranged bandage round his wrist. There could be no mistake as to the nature of the wound. The point of a

duelling sword alone could have thus pierced the flesh in two distinct places, and produced those triangular apertures.

"A duel!" sighed M. Jean; "these young men are all lunatics. This is what society—education leads to! Who would have believed it of this young man, he looks so gentle and so good!" The priest then examined the wound carefully and did not like the look of it. The tumefied flesh had assumed a violet tint, and a kind of bloody froth had coagulated round the two openings of the wound inflicted by M. de Saint-Avertin's sword. M. Jean bathed the wrist with cold water, and re-bandaged it gently with fine linen compresses soaked in arnica; and then he made his patient drink a few drops of *Eau de Mélisse des Carmes*. This capital old-time cordial worked wonders, and Julien soon opened his eyes, some colour came to his face and he sat up again in the chair.

"You feel better?" asked M. Jean.

"Yes, yes; it is over now; it was only a little weakness, occasioned by over fatigue," stammered the injured man.

"And by a sword thrust," sighed the priest. "Ah! sir, it's very wrong of you to have forgotten that God forbids our trying to take our neighbour's life."

"Quite true, I have been fighting, but I swear that I did not provoke the quarrel, which brought me to the duelling ground; a downright rogue, a thorough scoundrel insulted me."

"Hush! my dear lad, anger is another deadly sin; and, besides, you must not agitate yourself in your present condition; Doctor Minard, whom I have sent for, will tell you so presently, I'm sure of it."

"I shall be very glad to see him," said Julien, warmly; "but pending his arrival, couldn't you tell me——"

"Why I wrote for you to come? Ah! I am sincerely sorry that it occurred to me to do so, and, had I known that you were wounded, I should have left everything here and have set off for Paris. But I had seen you yesterday, when you entrusted me with the sealed package, and I had no cause to imagine—When did this duel take place?"

"This morning at five o'clock."

"And you left home without taking the time to have your wound properly dressed? It is incredible folly, and you make me regret my own foolishness; I ought to have reflected before sending you the letter."

"You could not guess that I had been fighting a duel," said La Chanterie, smiling. "And I swear you have rendered me the greatest service, for the terms of your letter leave me no doubt but what you have learnt something in the poacher's favour; indeed, at the moment when I so foolishly lost consciousness you were telling me of a discovery; if it could only help me to unmask that ruffian named Wassmann——"

"Gently, my dear child, I beg of you. It is painful to me to hear you give way to sentiments of hatred, even against this foreigner."

"But you are ignorant of all that has happened; you are not aware that during the last three days this man has organised a most infernal conspiracy against me, that it was he who got hold of a fellow well skilled in fencing to try and kill me; that he has not only tried to drown me, but has paid robbers to break into my house; you are not aware that I intend to call, to-day, on the magistrate to denounce Monsieur Wassmann to him afresh, and I hope that the magistrate won't hesitate about having him arrested. He will be the more disposed to seize this German, as you will accompany me to his

chambers, I'm sure, to show him the proof which Providence has placed in your hands."

"The proof! You no doubt allude to the affair which my letter referred to; but, my dear child, I did not speak of a proof, and above all I did not tell you that the discovery in any way established Monsieur Wassmann's guilt."

"What! it's not a proof against him that—I must have been strangely mistaken then as to the sense of the letter which Madame Ledoux brought me. You spoke of my assisting the unhappy family which we are interested in, of doing a good action——"

"Search for truth is always praiseworthy, and I applied for your help to enable me to discover the real facts."

"It is entirely at your service, your reverence; but I beg of you to tell me what has happened."

"I should prefer to await the doctor's permission for doing so. In your condition you require rest and quiet; the least emotion might aggravate your sufferings, and, besides, you seem to me scarcely disposed to listen calmly to anything connected with poor Michel's murder."

"I will be quite calm, I give you my word of honour for it. And you can see, too, that your kind care has quite restored me, that I am fully self-possessed and have recovered all my strength."

This was boasting on M. de la Chanterie's part, especially inasmuch as his strength was concerned, for he tried to rise from his chair and could hardly succeed in doing so. The priest gently obliged him to resume his seat; and then, having doubtless reflected that by refusing to gratify his curiosity he might only excite him more, he said with a kind smile: "I yield to your reasoning, my son, and the story I am about to tell you will, I trust, help you to wait patiently for M. Minard's arrival. Remember you have just promised me to remain calm."

"And I still promise it, your reverence."

"Very well then; you must know that we are indebted for the discovery which I wrote to you about to a poor child of whom you must often have heard me speak, Marcel——"

"The lad whom Madame Ledoux brought here, and whom that fellow Wassmann——"

"Exactly," answered M. Jean, who seemed anxious to curtail all recriminations against his neighbour at the Pavillon des Sorbiers. "I must tell you that I have partly undertaken the education of this little fellow, and I soon realised that he had not only a good heart, but also rare intelligence. He learns with incredible facility, and I am certain that Providence, which has so richly endowed him, will help me to make a man out of him."

"And he has found——"

"I am coming to it. His master, old Ledoux, allows him to come to the parsonage early every morning for me to teach him, and the child never fails to do so, as he is fond of learning. Only he sometimes carries on the way. At his age one can understand it. Well, this morning, instead of following the high road, he came round by the Marne, and to reach the parsonage he had to cross the Bélière woods. Was it chance or the natural curiosity of children that led him to the spot where the unlucky keeper was killed? I hardly know. Anyhow, while he was amusing himself rummaging among the trees and bushes, he found on the ground a piece of paper rolled into a pellet——"

"A gun-wad!" exclaimed Julien, whose heart beat with joy and hope.

"Everything makes me fancy that this paper did serve as a gun-wad, as you say, and what is really surprising is that the same idea occurred to Marcel; so instead of throwing the paper away, as many children would have done, he brought it to me, and called my notice to the fact that there was some handwriting on it."

"Writing?" echoed the wounded man, with intense emotion; "it is the second wad—it is the other half of the torn letter."

"The second wad? the other half of the torn letter!" answered the curé, with an astonished look. "What do you mean, my son?"

"It's quite true. You don't know—I did not tell you when I gave you the sealed packet. I will explain it all to you; but go on, I beg of you. You were saying that this little boy had brought you a paper rolled up in a pellet, and that on this paper there was some handwriting?"

"Yes, and I own that the discovery impressed me greatly at first. I remembered that at the time of the search, following upon the murder, the sergeant of gendarmes had found four felt wads in Bélière woods, and that this circumstance was considered conclusive evidence against Robert."

"Yes, indeed; and he has constantly been haunted with it. Ah, well! the prosecution was as wrong on this point as on all the others. The murderer, you see, took the precaution to withdraw these wads from his gun before firing. So it was not the poacher who fired the fatal shot as he was in ambush when Michel suddenly surprised him, as the prosecution itself states. In that case, how could he have had time to remove the wads?"

"The same idea occurred to me; and when I saw some writing on the crumpled paper, I firmly believed that I possessed an explanation of the mystery."

"Well?"

"Well, the writing on the paper has not materially enlightened me, for the lines are imperfect."

"That's it; it's the second half!"

"Imperfect, and even burnt in some places."

"Precisely; it was the wad which separated the powder from the shot in the murderer's gun. He no doubt did not think it necessary to remove it, judging that it would take fire as soon as he pulled the trigger. As for the other wad, however, the one which rammed down the shot, he extracted it, fearing that it might be found intact."

"I don't know if your guess is a correct one," said the priest, who did not think very much of M. de la Chanterie's deductions, as he was unaware of the first discovery; "but I know that if the murderer reckoned as you say, he was much mistaken, for the writing, although injured here and there, is still quite legible."

"And it proves Robert's innocence, does it not?" added Julien, whose face lit up with joy and hope.

"Alas! not as clearly as I could wish. I have read these imperfect lines over and over again, and I confess that they do not tell one much."

"I will undertake to complete them, and show their exact sense."

"It was with the idea of your helping me to do so that I begged of you to come here, but I doubt of your being more successful than myself."

"I am certain that I shall be successful, your reverence, as soon as you have shown me the paper——"

"Here it is," said M. Jean, opening his book; "I put it between the leaves of my breviary to smooth it out."

Julien took hold of the fragment and saw that the imperfect lines ran as follows :—

follow thee, I
 prove to thee
 all kinds of
 of a false
 troubling thee
 has its limits
 to commit
 an infamy to
 that young man that I
 when I
 not to thyself
 thou dost not
 if thou
 ce
 and to
 there are
 est
 may have seen thee
 friend
 design. Thou wilt again
 In conclusion I
 promise me that thou wilt
 thou wouldst, friend
 speak one word

This was all, and certainly these disconnected words could have told M. Jean very little. But Julien had recognised the writing at the first glance, and had no doubt but what he now held the other fragment of the letter, part of which he had found a fortnight previously. This new fragment was much narrower than the first one, and consequently less clear, for it only contained the fag ends of sentences, and even here and there but half words and syllables. On the left side, moreover, the powder had burnt the paper, so that there would be some gaps when the two pieces were laid side by side ; however, Julien fully expected to ascertain something of their purport by combining them.

"Well ! what do you make of these hieroglyphics ?" the curé asked him. "I am sure that you believe the secret to be hidden in this document, and that you think, like I do, that if we possessed the remainder of it we might manage to save that unlucky Robert."

"We have the rest," said Julien, radiantly.

"What ?"

"You have kept the package I entrusted to you yesterday ?"

"Of course ; and so that it might be the safer I have carried it about my person."

"Then, you have it here ?"

M. Jean slipped his hand under his cassock and drew out a grey envelope sealed with red wax, which he handed to M. de la Chanterie.

The latter took it from him with signs of evident emotion, tore it open and exhibited a paper similar to the one which the priest had pressed between the leaves of his breviary. "Come," he cried, hastening to a garden table where M. Jean usually took his coffee on fine evenings. "Come and see, your reverence, what a miracle Providence has performed in our favour ;" and he

spread upon the table the two fragments of paper, placing them side by side. Thus combined they read as follows, several of the sentences being imperfect as the paper was burnt here and there. For the same reason there was no beginning and no end to this extraordinary document :—

“since I have left all to follow thee I have not ceased a day to prove to thee my devotion. I have borne all kinds of humiliations, all the tortures of a false position, without complaining, without troubling thee with one reproach. But self-sacrifice has its limits, and I shall never have the courage to commit an infamy, for it *would* be an infamy to allow it to be thought by that young man that I am free. There are moments when I ask myself if thy design is not to——thyself of me if thou dost not hate me, if thou dost not despise me, for indeed! O———if thou didst really love me thou would'st not command me———ce this loyal young man———and to allure him here to extort from him———there are days when thou terrifiest me, when———est of ridding thyself of this keeper who may have seen thee formerly in Alsace. I entreat thee———friend———renounce this criminal design. Thou wilt again repeat that I am mad. In conclusion I ask thee in mercy to promise me that thou wilt let me go away. Oh ; if thou would'st, friend, how happy we should be. Speak one word ; only one word, and I——”

Julien read this letter with the avidity of a man who expects to find the key of a puzzling enigma, but to his great deception, when he reached the end of the document, he had not obtained much enlightenment.

The priest, who had been reading over his shoulder, was greatly surprised, for, not having had the earlier fragments before him, he had so far been unable to make *any* sense of his discovery. La Chanterie, on the other hand, despaired of ascertaining the full meaning of the various phrases, though his insight suggested a deal of their significance. In point of fact, although the ends of the lines found by Marcel completed the fragmentary sentences, they did not throw any new light on the matter or furnish any clue as to the person who had written the letter, or the person who had received it. By a strange fatality the powder had burnt the paper exactly in the most interesting places. Thus a passage which would no doubt have solved the problem, was incomplete. It ran as follows:—“If thou didst really love me, thou wouldst not command me——ce this loyal young man——and to allure him here to extort from him——there are.”

The missing words evidently stated what the recipient of the letter had ordered the writer to do in regard to “this loyal young man,” and what the writer was “to extort from him.”

Thus Julien and M. Jean would have been enlightened as to the mysterious young man's identity, and might have even been able, with such a clue, to discover the guilty party. Matters were even more annoying as regards the passage: “despise me, for indeed O—— if thou,” &c. The missing word, the only one wanting to complete the sentence, must have been the culprit's name, as the interjection “O” clearly indicated. It really seemed as if the gunpowder had been in league with the murderer.

“It is most marvellous!” murmured Julien, so overwhelmed by this disaster, that he forgot his sufferings for awhile.

“Yes, indeed, the connection of these two pieces of paper is really extraordinary,” said M. Jean. “I am not aware how the first piece came into your possession, but——”

“I found it in Belière woods on the day after the crime, on the very spot where Michel was killed, and where this child found the other fragment.”

"In that case," sighed M. Jean, "there can be no longer any doubt about it this letter must have been addressed to the murderer."

"Most certainly it was. But one would think that this certainty distressed you."

"Alas ! it is hardly calculated to please me."

"Good gracious ! why ?"

"Because it strikes me that the letter could only have been written to that unfortunate man Robert, and it dispels my last illusions as to his innocence."

"Do you really think so, your reverence ?" exclaimed Julien. "Well, I am of an exactly opposite opinion, and it seems to me that this letter is conclusive proof of Monsieur Wassmann's guilt, for it could never have been addressed to anyone else but him."

"Your antipathy for my neighbour blinds you, my son," said M. Jean, "However much it costs me to say so, I am obliged to admit that the language of this fragmentary document points to poor Eugénie's husband as the author of the crime."

"I don't see that at all."

"Well, I see it only too clearly. There is especially one passage which destroys all doubt on the subject. It is that in which the writer says 'this keeper who may have seen thee formerly in Alsace.'"

"What connection do you see between Alsace and Robert ?" asked M. de a Chanterie.

"The connection is self-evident when one knows, as I do, that the regiment of hussars in which Robert served was for two years garrisoned at Colmar, the birthplace of Michel Amstein, who was there at that very time. The poor poacher's wife told me this herself."

"And did she tell you she had been acquainted with Michel ?"

"No ; Robert stayed in Alsace before he married her, but the fact is none the less incontestable."

"Then you think that it was she who wrote this letter ?"

"Not at all. I am certain of the contrary, for I know her handwriting, which is not at all like this."

"Then where does the letter come from ?"

"That I can't tell, but apparently it comes from some poor creature whom Robert has ill-used,—probably seduced and then deserted."

"You forget, your reverence, that the writer speaks of a devotion that has never ceased for a single day, of all kinds of humiliation, of a false position in life, and of a common sojourn in this country which she wished to leave. A woman who had had but a passing connection with Robert would never use such language surely."

"But what is there to show that this unhappy woman does not live at Charly, among us, in fact, hiding her shame, and trembling every hour at the thought that her fault may have come to light, and her seducer been condemned ? Look here, Monsieur Julien, I have been for thirty years a village priest, and I am well acquainted with country morals. The more I reflect, the more I am confirmed in the idea that the poacher, during his wandering life, has met with some poor child of this place or its neighbourhood whom he has led astray. He is still young, he has a fine athletic figure, and, thanks to his education and intelligence, he has an immense superiority over the simple peasantry. You can't imagine either what sort of fascination such a man as he exerts over the feminine nature, by making himself superior to all law and leading a free and independent life in spite of gamekeepers and gendarmes. Poachers hereabouts play the part of Calabrian brigands. They

enjoy the sympathy and admiration of the lower classes, who naturally hate all authority. They doubtless look upon Robert as a hero, and he has charmed the eyes of some farmer's daughter. No doubt some such person wrote this letter to him."

"Excuse me, your reverence," said Julien, excitedly; "I agree with you in chinking Robert has made some conquests in the neighbourhood, but neither the style nor certain expressions of the letter agree with your supposition."

"The style!" exclaimed M. Jean; "it seems to me that it is quite that of a half-educated woman, giving way to emphatic diction through reading trashy novels. You are probably not aware that in the suburbs the smallest market-gardener, if he makes a good thing of his early produce, sends his daughters to a Paris boarding-school, where they learn too much, and yet not enough?"

"Granted! But how do you explain the sentences alluding to a young man who is being deceived, or about to be deceived?"

"I fancy that it is easy to give an explanation of those sentences. Don't you see, my dear boy, that this *loyal young man* is some honest workman, or farm labourer, hoping to marry the poor girl whom he believes to be virtuous, and by whom he thinks he is beloved. What Robert orders her to *extort* from him is doubtless an offer of marriage, and I can't imagine a viler action than to give her such advice, knowing as he does what has passed between her and himself. Were I sure that Michel's murder was committed in a moment of anger, I should excuse it more easily than this cowardly treachery."

"And so should I, certainly! But while recognising the fact that appearances are perhaps against Robert, I can't reconcile myself to the idea of his guilt."

"It is also repugnant to me to think that he has committed murder; but my opinion is made up, and I feel quite sure that if the paper had not been burnt here and there you would read after the interjection 'O'—the name of Robert."

"Ah, your reverence, you drive me to despair," murmured Julien, overwhelmed by the weight of evidence. "The deception I now experience is all the greater, as the note Jacqueline Ledoux brought me from you led me to expect better news."

"Remember," said M. Jean, "that at the moment of writing to you I was only aware of the fragmentary document which Marcel found. The words it bore had no determined sense, but I was inclined to believe that they were favourable to the man in whom we are both so interested. In begging of you to come here I hoped you would assist me in finding a satisfactory explanation of the writing, and I did not suspect that you would involuntarily bring me proof of the man's guilt. Had I sooner seen the fragment which you found I should have spared you a useless journey and a cruel deception."

"So according to you everything goes to prove the poacher's guilt, and we must renounce all hope of establishing his innocence?"

"I fear so."

"What is to be done then, your reverence? Do you advise me to abandon him entirely, when we know his wife will die of grief, if——"

"God forbid. On the contrary, I am of opinion that we ought to uphold this unfortunate man and his family in their terrible trial. But it seems to me that if he would only make a full confession, and show sincere repentance for his crime, our task would be greatly facilitated. You could plead to the jury that Robert in firing upon Michel gave way to a fatal and momentary fit

of anger, which, moreover, I feel sure was really the case. As for myself, I should be ready to attest the accused man's regret for his crime, and bear witness that he had come to a better state of mind; I would speak of his unhappy wife and little children, to whom infamy would remain attached if their father were condemned. I am certain that we should touch the feelings of the judge and obtain at any rate a lenient sentence."

"Far as the judge's indulgence might go it would not save Robert from an ignominious condemnation; but perhaps it is, alas! our only resource, and I shall probably resign myself to following your advice. However, I swear to you that it costs me a good deal to fall in with your opinion. I know that you argue with greater calmness than I do, that your conclusions could not be more sensible, that this letter by which I hoped to save Robert turns against him; and yet, despite all this, something tells me that an incredible fatality is misleading us and shielding the real culprit, and that this culprit—is Monsieur Wassmann."

"So you still cling to that theory, my son," said M. Jean, gently. "However, you won't make anyone believe that it was the foreigner who killed Michel; for he could have had no interest in committing such a murder, and besides he has clearly proved an alibi."

"Yes, it is quite possible that people won't believe me, but if they knew that for the last two days Wassmann has been on my track to prepare pitfalls for my destruction——"

"You told me that just now, my son; and I know that you are incapable of falsehood; only be convinced that you are deceived by false appearances. The person whom you wrongly suspect is, I have no doubt of it whatever, a perfectly honourable man."

"What! Your reverence, are you also duped by the hypocrisy of——"

"Just listen to me, I beg of you," interrupted M. Jean. "Like you I have had some prejudices against my neighbour at the Pavillon des Sorbiers, but they have been dispelled since I have observed his generous and delicate conduct as regards young Marcel. Not content with paying him a good sum down, to indemnify him for his fright, M. Wassmann has called to see me, and announced his intention of bearing whatever expense the child's education may eventually entail. Almost every day for a week past he has called on the Ledoux and overwhelmed them with presents. You would fancy he wished that everyone connected with the orphan child should participate in his bounty, including even Mademoiselle Rose, who keeps the café, where he first saw the poor child after the accident. The poor lady has a fever and nervous attacks, which come on every evening at nine o'clock. Well, Monsieur Wassmann has been to see her, and sends her various remedies, which he pays for out of his own purse. I may add that all this is well known in Charly, and that the opinion of the townsfolk is entirely in favour of this worthy Austrian."

"I shall not struggle with it," said Julien, bitterly. "Will you allow me, your reverence, to keep the two halves of this letter, which may perhaps be of use to me later on?"

"It is yours, my dear boy, and may it assist you in arriving at the truth," replied M. Jean, at once; and he placed the two fragments in the envelope which had previously contained but one of them.

M. de la Chanterie had just slipped the precious parcel in his pocket-book when some footsteps were heard in the passage. "Here is the doctor at last," exclaimed the curé. And he ran out to meet the visitor, who was not at all the person he expected. It was, indeed, M. Wassmann, who suddenly showed himself on the garden threshold. Julien had quite forgotten his

wound during his conversation with the priest, but for the last few minutes fatigue had greatly increased the pain ; and, moreover, the doctor's arrival was most desirable, as the swelling of the hand was rapidly increasing. When, instead of Doctor Minard, as M. Jean announced, the young advocate espied the very man whom he so detested, he was roused to a furious pitch of indignation. He rose abruptly, and walked, with clenched teeth and threatening looks, towards this same M. Wassmann whose praises the priest had just been singing. M. Jean was quite alarmed by Julien's appearance, and fearing some scene of violence, in which the wounded man would necessarily not have the advantage, he placed himself between the young advocate and the complacent foreigner, who was quietly coming down the garden steps. However, he soon saw that his intervention was superfluous, for M. Wassmann's intentions were evidently most pacific. By his good-tempered smile and sympathetic expression of face, it was quite plain that he meant to treat whatever ill-tempered sallies that Julien might indulge in with all the consideration due to his misfortune. He first approached M. Jean, and cordially shook hands with him, and then he turned towards Julien and bowed to him with perfect ease. "Allow me, sir, to inquire after your health."

"Ah, this is going too far," muttered M. de la Chanterie.

"You will perhaps think me indiscreet," continued the amiable tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers, "and I confess that nothing warrants my alluding to an affair of honour in which I took no part. But between people of the same society an infraction of the orthodox rules may occasionally be permitted, especially when this infraction is prompted by sincere interest in——"

"Many thanks, sir ! but I have no wish to inspire you with the least interest," interrupted Julien.

"Granted," said M. Wassmann, gently, "but you cannot prevent my deploring the sorry issue of a quarrel, in which the better cause was defeated, and blaming the ill-mannered conduct of your opponent."

"How do you know that my opponent's conduct was ill-mannered ?" asked Julien, excitedly.

"Why, sir ! you are surely aware that everything is discussed in clubs. Your quarrel with Monsieur de Saint-Avertin became the news of the evening almost immediately after it occurred, and the members present talked of it so much, that all thought of war was forgotten. Monsieur de Saint-Avertin and his friends, who are very ill bred, related the circumstances of the quarrel to everybody, and in such ill-judged terms, that I felt bound to silence them. Unfortunately, social etiquette prohibited any further action on my part, and whatever sympathy I felt for you, I could not interfere in a more direct manner. I therefore had to limit myself to asking for some news about this duel, which I could not prevent. To my great grief, I learnt from one of your opponent's seconds that it was to come off this morning, and I confess, that if I have called here so early to-day, it was in view of asking his reverence to make inquiries as to the result of the meeting ; I was aware that our venerable friend was on terms of intimacy with you."

"Why did not you procure the information from Monsieur de Saint-Avertin ?" interrupted Julien, rudely.

"I thought I had had the honour of telling you that I don't associate with that disagreeable individual," replied M. Wassmann, taking no notice of Julien's abrupt manner. "Besides, I could not have met him, for he never comes to the club before midnight, and yesterday afternoon I left Paris for Charly."

"You returned to Charly yesterday. At what o'clock, please ?"

"Why, at about three o'clock, if I remember rightly," said the foreigner,

with perfect composure. "I think I had the honour of bowing to our reverend friend opposite, who was just leaving the church as my carriage passed the porch."

"That's true," said M. Jean.

"What! at three o'clock!" muttered Julien, astounded to hear the priest confirm this new alibi.

The suppositions which his imagination had conjured up crumbled away one after another, and he began to ask himself whether he were not the victim of some strange hallucinations respecting this M. Wassmann, and whether the repeated apparition of a pair of red whiskers had not been entirely due to chance.

"I spent the evening taking a long drive with my daughter in the direction of Cœuilly Park," continued the tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers, "and I was so preoccupied as to the issue of this unfortunate business that Catherine remarked my absent-mindedness. Now, however, thank heavens, I have no further cause for anxiety, since I have the pleasure of meeting you again, wounded, it is true, but not so seriously after all. I hope——"

"Probably much more seriously than we fancy," put in M. Jean, "and M. de la Chanterie has acted very imprudently in coming to Charly instead of going to bed; I am at this moment expecting Dr. Minard, who will certainly agree with me, and I am greatly astonished that he has not yet arrived; he must have been called out for some consultation in the neighbourhood."

Julien was not listening to the priest. He was looking the German full in the face, as if trying to dive down to his very soul, and instead of replying to his kind inquiries, he suddenly asked this scarcely polite question: "May I be allowed to know, sir, to what I am indebted for the favour of all the interest you seem to take in me? I am not, so far as I am aware, in the least degree entitled to your benevolence. Further, I neither know, nor desire to know, you. I have therefore every reason to feel astonished that you should interest yourself in me in this fashion, and I——"

"Excuse me, sir," rejoined the patient foreigner; "if I have not yet been happy enough to arrive at any intimacy with you, such as I greatly desire, I may at least congratulate myself on the friendship with which I am favoured by your cousin, the Viscount Henri de Brannes; and had I no other reason——"

"This reason appears to me to be quite insufficient to warrant your interference in matters which concern myself alone. My cousin is master of his own actions. I presume I am master of mine, and——"

"Doubtless, sir, but your relationship with Captain de Brannes is not the only motive which draws me towards you."

"What are the others, I should like to know?"

"Why should I hesitate to confess them," exclaimed M. Wassmann, in a sympathising tone. "I felt touched on hearing of your noble desire to save the husband of an unfortunate woman——"

"What do you say? Pray what is the meaning——?"

"Oh, don't try to conceal it, sir; there is no reason why you should blush for your generous efforts to prove that poacher's innocence."

"Who told you about my efforts——?"

"They are no longer a secret anywhere, and had I known of them on the day when I first had the honour of meeting you near the Marne,—under circumstances which you cannot have forgotten, had I known, I say, that the guilt of the man accused of murdering the gamekeeper was by no means

fully proved, and that you had undertaken the very honourable task of running the real murderer to earth, I beg of you to believe, sir, that I should not have waited until now to express my sympathy and admiration. I should have gone farther, sir ; I should have begged of you to allow me to participate in your efforts to discover the truth, in all loyalty and openness, as becomes gentlemen, and perhaps by working together we should have succeeded in discovering it."

This was all said so warmly and frankly, that tears came to M. Jean's eyes, and Julien was well nigh confounded. M. Wassmann, no doubt, perceived the effect he had made, for he proceeded with a kindly smile, and not without a slight touch of malice: "Don't ask me where I have picked up my information. I have paid sufficient for it, for I myself was suspected of the crime. Yes, indeed, such is the truth," he added by way of reply to a gesture made by M. de la Chanterie. "I was summoned before the investigating magistrate and I had to explain various charges brought against me by an anonymous denunciator. There is no need to tell you that I easily cleared myself, but I declare to you that, far from feeling any grudge against the authorities for summoning me, I am glad to have had the opportunity of admiring the manner in which criminal prosecutions are conducted, and did it depend on me to clear up this mystery, I would willingly place my time and fortune at the disposal of justice. That is exactly what you are doing, sir, and I thought that as I warmly admired your laudable conduct, I had a right to feel some interest in your person."

This little harangue was delivered with an accent of wounded pride and discreet reserve, which brought Julien's bewilderment to a climax. Fallen from the summit of his illusions, obliged to admit that his certainties had now become mere fancies, doubting everyone, even himself, he looked at the good old priest and read in his eyes the conviction that M. Wassmann was innocent. The scene was becoming generally embarrassing, excepting perhaps for the foreigner, who had in no wise lost his composure. Happily, the doctor's arrival quite changed the current of the conversation.

Doctor Minard apologised for his delay in coming; he had been called to the station to attend to a porter who had just broken his leg, and now he approached Julien, and speedily undid the bandages round his injured wrist. Hardly had he glanced at the wound than his face became gloomy. He had arrived with a merry sparkle in his eyes, had bowed to the priest with fitting deference for his cloth, and to M. Wassmann with all the respect due to a wealthy man, who might some day become a valuable patient ; then he had approached Julien with the easy air doctors are wont to assume, in view of reassuring their patients before even commencing the examination. This easy air always seems to imply: "Don't alarm yourself ; it's a mere nothing; and anyhow I know everything that will be required to cure you." It is almost like a signboard bearing the inscription, "Good health sold here." However, a little later they often pull a long face; their forehead grows thoughtful; they compress their lips, in order to avoid pronouncing the words, "it's very serious!" which can be read, however, clearly enough on their lineaments. This was the case with M. Minard now. He made Julien sit down, and, placing himself on one side a little in the rear, he proceeded to examine the wound carefully.

Worn out by all the talking, the young advocate had sunk back on the garden chair and half-closed his eyes, so that he could not see the doctor's gestures. M. Jean, on the contrary, did not lose a single shrug of M. Minard's shoulders, and M. Wassmann had so stationed himself as to have a full view of this

suggestive pantomime, which seemed to interest him in a high degree. The priest and the foreigner thus waited to hear the doctor's report; but time went on without him speaking and they did not dare to question him.

"It's incredible," grumbled M. Minard at last; "the wound has not even had a first dressing. It has barely been bathed, and bound up to keep it from contact with the air; and yet the sword—for it certainly is a sword wound—must have passed very close to the main artery, and, in transpiercing the flesh between the two bones of the forearm, it must necessarily have torn the periosteum."

"And you are not aware, my dear doctor," murmured the priest; "you are not aware this dear boy was so grievously imprudent as to travel by rail in his present condition."

"What idiot? what village quack can have authorized such mad locomotion?" exclaimed M. Minard, with the righteous indignation which every member of the Faculty displays when a person not licensed to practise the healing art presumes to play the doctor.

"Don't accuse any one," said Julien in a weak voice, "it was my own absolute wish to set out at once; and as no doctor was present at the duel —"

"What, sir! you were as foolish as that, and set out for a duel without taking any doctor, at the risk of speedily dying from frightful hæmorrhage, and for want of somebody who knew how to tie up a severed artery or vein! It would be a thousand times better to fight a duel without seconds, and if I were a legislator, I would enact severe penalties against fools who venture to do without——"

"I was in the wrong, I own, but I am not dead, and as I can now rely on your skill and care——"

"You are not dead! you are not dead!" echoed the doctor; "certainly not, and I hope you won't die; but if you think this wound is a simple scratch, you are greatly deceived, and you may pay dearly for your carelessness, for, on my word of honour—I can't get over it—it was so easy for you as you passed Vincennes to beg the first assistant army surgeon you came across, to go with you to the duelling-ground."

"But, doctor, I fought the duel near Chatou, so I could not ——"

"Then you could have found one at the Courbevoie barracks. Besides, it seems that you have been even more foolish than I thought at first, since instead of *one* railway journey you have actually made two. You evidently wished to risk your life after the duel as before it."

"Well—what is there to be afraid of?" asked Julien, hesitatingly.

"All the complications you like to name—all, and the least that can befall you is that you will have to keep your bed for a fortnight, and your room for six weeks," said the doctor, abruptly.

"Six weeks! That's quite impossible! I am not going to stay six weeks shut up at home, when my presence is indispensable here and at ——"

"Here! did you say? I'm sure I hope that you won't stir."

"What, doctor? Why I must get back to Paris this morning."

"Well, I formally oppose any such conduct, and I forbid your taking any journey, under pain of death."

"Ah! good heavens!" murmured the priest, joining his hands in prayer.

"Is it as serious as that?" asked M. Wassmann in a low tone, and leaning towards the doctor.

"I repeat that I am obliged to start," continued Julien.

"Ah ! So you compel me to speak out !" exclaimed M. Minard. "Very good, then. You must understand that in your present condition, and given the great heat of the dog-days, there are three chances to one that, leaving the risk of gangrene on one side, you will be taken with lock-jaw, which will carry you clean off."

"My dear son, I beg of you," said M. Jean softly, "think of the grief you would cause your uncle—and—*Mademoiselle de Brannes*."

"But, your reverence, what am I to do ?" sighed the wounded man, somewhat shaken in his resolution ; "I cannot obtain proper attendance at an inn, even supposing that there is one at Charly."

"What ! Is it that which worries you ; when you can go to the *Château de Chasseneuil*, where the count will be so delighted to receive you," interrupted the doctor. "It is much better for you to stay there than in Paris even, for you will require constant attention and perfect quiet."

"I can't drop in on my uncle without the risk of thoroughly frightening him, and frightening—"

"I will undertake to prepare everyone interested in you for your arrival at the *château*," whispered the worthy priest.

Julien blushed, for M. Jean had divined the truth. The injured man was especially worried as to the effect which his misadventure would have on *Gabrielle de Brannes*. However, he still hesitated, for it seemed hard to renounce taking an active part in the poacher's case. M. Jean's arguments had not yet entirely convinced him of M. Wassmann's innocence, and it was most repugnant to him to leave the field free. The doctor felt that it was necessary to add a final touch to his previous words, and he had recourse to a somewhat unexpected argument.

"Look here !" he exclaimed, "you're surely not going to expose yourself to the voluntary loss of a limb just when you may be called upon at any moment to serve your country. Yes ; I say lose a limb ; for I have seen amputations performed for less cause than this. What the deuce do you want to lose an arm for ? At any rate let it be on the field of battle."

"We have not come to that yet, thank God !" remarked M. Jean.

"Eh ! who knows !" answered M. Minard, "war is declared, or almost so, and no one knows how it will end. It's all very fine to shout out that we once went to Berlin and are going there again ; but the Germans once came to Paris, and would like to come there again. Now *Monsieur de la Chanterie* belongs to the Mobile Guard, which will be called out directly we are in the least beaten. He is a plucky fellow, and he ought to be ready to march if the country should need him."

"Yes, certainly," said Julien with sparkling eyes.

"Do you know, doctor, you are not over comforting in your statements," remarked the priest ; "I know nothing of military matters, but I have perfect confidence in our soldiers' valour."

"So have I," retorted the doctor, who while talking had properly bandaged the injured wrist ; "but the wise man is prepared for all emergencies, you know. I served during the Italian campaign in '59 as an auxiliary surgeon, and I have seen what a chance thing victory is ; to my mind it is quite as likely that I shall be requisitioned for an ambulance corps stationed at Charly, under the enemy's fire, as that I shall learn within a month from now that we have conquered the whole left bank of the Rhine."

"My dear doctor," said M. Wassmann smiling, "I can assure you that the war will give you no chance of exercising your professional skill, at least in this charming village, for the Prussians will never enter France ; but if by any pos-

sibility they did reach this part, I commend myself beforehand to your good care, as I am perfectly determined to risk my life, or limbs, rather than to let the enemy enter Charly, and pillage my pretty villa."

"Really? You would really fight for us?" asked M. Minard. "I thought that in your quality of foreigner——"

"I am an Austrian, sir, and as such, very desirous of taking my revenge for Sadowa."

"Quite right; I did not think of that; but as you will be one of ourselves, sir," said the doctor gaily, "I have no fear for our Charly. We four will defend it vigorously; for I feel sure that his reverence would willingly shoulder a musket, if need were; and as for Monsieur de la Chanterie, who will certainly be cured, if he only follows my advice——"

"I will follow it, doctor," said Julien, "for I have made up my mind to stay at the château, providing that my uncle is willing to receive me there."

"Do you doubt it, my son?" exclaimed the priest. "I will go at once to announce your arrival to Monsieur de Brannes, and when he learns——"

"Excuse my interrupting you, your reverence," began M. Wassmann, "but I must now take leave of you, for I fear that by prolonging my visit, I may inconvenience Monsieur de la Chanterie, who needs all your care, and our excellent doctor's too. Allow me, sir," turning towards Julien, "to express my truest wishes for your prompt recovery, and to hope that we shall become better acquainted."

Having said this, the foreigner bowed with perfect composure, and went off as he had come—that is, without any noise or fluster whatever.

"That's first-rate!" exclaimed M. Minard; "that's the sort of German I like; and if they were all like him on the other side of the Rhine——"

However, the doctor did not conclude this panegyric on his client of the Pavillon des Sorbiers, for he saw that no one was listening to him. Julien had risen from his armchair and had led the good priest to the end of the garden, where, in a voice full of emotion, he exclaimed, "You know what it costs me to abandon, even momentarily, the difficult task which I have undertaken; but I feel that the doctor is right, and I wish to live so as to take up the case again later on. Until I am able to set to work at it once more, promise me, your reverence, that you will watch for me, without neglecting anything which could help us to prove Robert's innocence; for I do not renounce the task of defending him, or the hope of saving him altogether."

"I will help you as far as it lies in my power to do," said M. Jean, sadly; "but I really despair of achieving the result which we are both so anxious for."

VIII.

It was fortunate for Julien de la Chanterie that he followed Doctor Minard's advice, for very serious symptoms soon set in, and during several weeks his life was really in danger. Lockjaw luckily had not declared itself, but the inflammation had reached the arm, the wound had a very bad appearance, and more than once the medical men, summoned in consultation from Paris, discussed the advisability of amputation, against which, however, the patient always energetically protested. What would have happened to the unlucky fellow if, in his imprudence, he had persisted in his idea of returning to the Rue de Verneuil, and voluntarily foregoing his uncle's hospitality? But for the continual care he received at the château, but for his cousin's presence at his bedside, he would have died of impatience and grief, even supposing that science

had succeeded in preventing any terrible result from the wound. At M. de Brannes's house, however, he was in the best possible position for struggling against injury and despair; and it was less his own vigorous constitution than Gabrielle's presence that enabled him to resist the fever which was consuming him.

People don't die easily at five-and-twenty, especially when they know that some one loves them; and the proud, capricious young girl who had delighted in teasing Julien when he was well had not been able to hide from him, now that he was wounded, that she really loved him. Still more, she had cursed her foolish ambition which had caused this misfortune, and, instead of thinking of imposing any further perilous tasks upon her cousin, she reflected as to how she might prevent him from proceeding with the dangerous enterprise, and dissuade him from sacrificing himself in his efforts to prove the problematical innocence of the poacher. This miracle was really due to M. de Saint-Avertin, and not a day passed but what Julien blessed his luck in having been wounded on the island of Croissy.

The Count de Brannes, never having been admitted into his nephew's confidence as regards the man accused of murdering his gamekeeper, failed to notice the happy change in Julien's mind and manner. He only thought of the result of the duel, and never ceased reviling the Paris clubs, or rather the bad society that was admitted to them, for being himself a member of the Jockey Club he could hardly blame the institution of clubs in general. He was also very indignant with his son Henri, who had neither prevented the duel taking place nor assisted his cousin on the ground; and matters would have been bad for Henri had the count known that his son's negligence in the matter was due to the absorbing nature of his passion for Mademoiselle Wassmann. M. de Brannes persisted in keeping both the father and daughter at a distance; and, although M. Wassmann often sent to inquire after M. de la Chanterie, he had not yet dared to show himself at the château.

The only persons seen by Julien outside his family were his two seconds, Fabrègue and Du Tremblay, who constantly visited him, bringing him news from Paris; and very sad news it was, for the series of French defeats had begun, and each week some mournful despatch arrived, saddening poor France already so sorely tried by the early reverses of the campaign. It is needless to add that M. Jean never failed to keep Julien company as often as the duties of his ministry allowed. Since the duel the worthy priest had borne unaided a heavy burden, for there was but himself to watch over Robert's case, and to take measures for the unlucky family. Now this dual mission, transmitted to him by M. de la Chanterie, and so heartily accepted, had brought him no satisfaction whatever.

After two months' questioning and cross-questioning, confrontations and inquiries, the investigation concerning the murder of M. de Brannes's gamekeeper had not advanced a step. The poacher still denied his guilt as energetically as he had done on the first day; the witnesses said nothing fresh, and the most careful search had failed to discover the author of the warning letter addressed to Jacqueline Ledoux. Even the evidence discreetly obtained with regard to M. Wassmann had brought nothing more to light. Plainly enough the Austrian had nothing whatever to do with the case.

The magistrate, although personally convinced of Robert's guilt, quite recognised that this guilt was not fully proven, and, moved by conscientious scruples, which did him honour, he persisted in searching for fresh evidence before sending the prisoner before the Assizes. Pending the discovery of any fresh proof of innocence or guilt, Robert still remained in jail, and everything

seemed to indicate that he would remain there some time longer. His poor wife, worn out by grief, was visibly fading away, and, to crown matters, the Cormier's business had been going from bad to worse ever since the declaration of war. The worthy priest thus saw only desolation and ruin around him; he almost despaired of succeeding in his task, and each time that he went to Paris to visit his charges he came back feeling sadder, for he did not know how to remedy their distress.

He kept his grief to himself, however, and whenever M. de la Chanterie questioned him as to the progress of the case, he limited himself to replying, that it remained much the same as before, and that the trial would certainly never come before the September Assizes, as had been at first imagined. M. Jean was silent also respecting the sorrows of the poacher's wife; Mademoiselle de Brannes was too much inclined to excite herself when her sympathy was appealed to on this woman's behalf, and he tried to turn the sensitive girl's charitable views in another direction—that of poor Marcel—whom it was quite permissible to love and help without being in any way compromised. He succeeded fairly well in this direction, and Gabrielle, roused from her somewhat thoughtless enthusiasm anent the poacher's wife, attached herself to the orphan, who, by the way, was not wanting in protectors, for during the last six weeks M. Wassmann had seemed bent on overwhelming him with presents. Gabrielle, on her side, often summoned the lad to the château, pampered and petted him, stuffed him with cakes and sweets, and had even some idea of teaching him the piano. Julien talked of seeing to Marcel's future; the count approved both of his daughter's kindness and his nephew's schemes; and Ledoux and his wife congratulated themselves on having kept the little foundling, who brought them in so many presents. Everything, therefore, went well at Charly, and on this hand M. Jean had no anxiety.

He was none the less pre-occupied by what occurred in the Rue de Charonne and at the Palais de Justice, and he ardently wished that he could put an end to the situation, which was becoming more and more painful to every one concerned in it. Prompt measures being necessary with regard to Antoine Cormier's monetary embarrassment, the worthy priest applied to M. de Brannes, and the count generously promised to place his purse at the cabinet-maker's service as soon as M. Jean asked him to do so. It was less easy for the curé to alleviate the sorrow of the deserted wife, for her husband obstinately refused to see her, although the investigating magistrate had granted her access to the prison; and the inexplicable repugnance which the poacher evinced for his unhappy wife Eugénie gave rise to all kinds of suppositions. The priest asked himself if this woman had been guilty of misconduct in former times, or if Robert merely disliked her because he preferred another woman. In the latter case, the other woman was probably Jacqueline's unknown correspondent, the writer also of the letter found torn in half in Bélière woods.

M. Jean wished to clear up all these mysterious points before committing himself to any definite course of action. He scarcely believed any longer in the husband's innocence, but disliked being obliged to doubt the wife. He had found a situation for her among some respectable shopkeepers, and only awaited the issue of Robert's case to ask her to accept it.

He resolved to make a last attempt to ascertain the truth, and, one day towards the end of August, he left Charly, intending to visit the poacher at Mazas, and to try and obtain from him a partial confession, which he certainly did not intend to use against him.

It was not the first time he had seen Robert at the prison, and although he had,

so far, been unable to obtain any revelations from him, he did not yet despair of gaining his confidence by dint of kind words and generous behaviour. Robert usually seemed pleased to see him, and showed himself grateful for the small presents of chocolate and cigars which M. Jean never failed to take him. This fellow, a rebel to all social laws, intractable as a prisoner, accustomed, moreover, to answering the magistrate in violent language, softened visibly when he was in the presence of the good old priest. He did not become communicative, and his manner remained brusque, but he was never unmannerly, and he quite abandoned the mocking tone which he freely indulged in when before the magistrate.

The priest, who was firmly decided this time to try everything he could to touch Robert's heart, was led as usual to the gloomy little parlour, where he was allowed to talk with him, through a grating it is true, but without any warder being present. A few minutes later the prisoner appeared, and was bolted into a kind of cage, the bars of which were sufficiently wide apart to allow of his shaking hands with his kind-hearted visitor. "Thank you for coming, your reverence," he said, not without some display of emotion, from which M. Jean augured well. "For not seeing any more of you, I thought that you also had abandoned me."

"Neither I, nor any of the people interested in you, will ever abandon you," answered the priest, gently.

"Why, who excepting yourself, is at all interested in me?"

"Don't you guess?"

"Lord, no! I can't guess," said Robert, indifferently; "unless you mean the young man who was going to buy my cray fish when his uncle had me arrested. I saw by his face that he did not believe in the gendarme's absurd reasoning, and I shouldn't be surprised if he had spoken up for me. But with that exception I know of no one interested in my troubles."

"What! nobody!" exclaimed M. Jean. "What! you haven't a single friend in the world?"

"A friend! Oh! I had plenty of friends when I had some money."

"And they have forsaken you in your misfortune?"

"Entirely; besides such has been the rule ever since the world began. Isn't there a Latin line which says so? For I used to know Latin, though you now see what I've come to. Certainly I have pretty well forgotten it, but I was as well educated as most people, and all the same, now here I am at Mazas. Ah! education is a fine thing!"

"Granted! but men are ungrateful and forgetful too," murmured the priest, who did not think it worth while to reply to this lively sally; "women are much readier in succouring misfortune."

"Women! they are far worse; they deceive for the mere pleasure of deceiving, and preferentially those who are silly enough to love them."

"Do you fancy then that some woman betrayed you and your secrets to the representatives of the law?" asked M. Jean excitedly, thinking at the moment of the anonymous letter.

"No; for it's a long time since I trusted any woman," replied the poacher, unhesitatingly.

An accused criminal, fearing his mistress's indiscretion, would not have answered so positively, and the worthy priest was delighted at this declaration. "In this respect," he answered, "you have acted rightly, and had you always used such discretion during your sad career——"

"Sad career! why so, pray? Because I paid no taxes, or because I was not an elector? It was an advantage I had over resident citizens, licensed

townsfolk and all that sort of thing. You will say that I value my rights of citizenship too cheaply, but politics once cost me too dearly for me to take any interest in them nowadays. You will perhaps reproach me with putting myself above the game and household laws! But what would you have? I was born with wandering tendencies and a horror of all discipline."

"Nevertheless, when you were young, you enlisted in the army," objected M. Jean, who was on the lookout for an opportunity of leading the conversation up to the poor woman whom Robert had married when a non-commissioned officer in the hussars.

"Quite true," said Robert; "but it was only out of love for the uniform. I had at that time a most foolish infatuation for plumes and lace, but I was quickly cured of it. Stable duty, sentry-go, and other like diversion soon disgusted me with the business. Ah! if we had only had a jolly war, I should perhaps have taken some fancy to the profession; but chance ordained that my regiment never went on active service during my time."

"I am certain you would have done your duty bravely."

"I can't tell, but I know I should have fought like any other man, and better than some. Why, since they locked me up, it seems they have come to blows with Prussia, and its going against us——"

"Alas! the enemy is now in France, and God knows if we shall not see the Germans at the very gates of Paris."

"Ah well, if the governor of Mazas would only give me leave to go and do a month's service with the sabre against those rascally Germans whom I so detest, I would willingly swear to come back to prison as soon as the fighting was over, and I would keep my oath as well as Regulus did. There's another little touch of college learning for you! It seems that the cellular system is favourable to Roman history——"

"But for this unhappy business you would be free and able to serve your country."

"If I have rotted here for the last two months, it is entirely the fault of the gendarmes, who took me for some one else. Bah! I shall be acquitted at the September Assizes, and there will perhaps be still time to have a turn at the Prussians—there is one of them in particular whom I should be glad to get within reach of my sword."

"You hope for an acquittal, then?"

"Do you think me guilty, your reverence, as you think I shall be convicted?"

"No," said M. Jean, warmly; "and I ask nothing better than to become fully convinced of your innocence, but I own that appearances are against you, and as God only reads all the hearts of men——"

"You fear that the jury will give my head to the public prosecutor so as not to disoblige him. After all, it is quite probable. I shall console myself with the thought that I shall be but a pendant to Lesurque. Besides, I am not good for much nowadays, and as for anyone regretting me if I receive marching orders for the other world, the matter isn't worth talking about."

"You forget that you have two children,—a wife who loves you—who has never ceased to love you."

"Eugénie!" exclaimed the poacher. "Ah! We have come to it at last, have we? I fancied it was to her you alluded just now, when you said that some one was interested in me."

"And you were not wrong in your surmises. Your wife only lives for you. She only thinks of saving you, and her only wish is to see you. She would consider herself happy could she but sacrifice herself to restore you to liberty."

"She should have begun by not having me arrested."

"You know as well as I do," said the priest, severely, "that she had not recognised you when you left the Belière woods."

"I know that she delivered me up to my pursuers; that's about all I do know."

"She has bitterly regretted the involuntary wrong she did you."

"You call it a wrong. She has made me safe for the guillotine."

"If you would not only listen to her, but consent to see her——"

"Has she requested you to ask me this?"

"Why should I hide it from you? I came here on her behalf. Your refusals are killing her, she is exhausting her strength by wandering round and round the prison walls, and if you reject her last request she will die of grief. If you have no pity on her, consent to see her out of gratitude to me, who have always been your defender."

"Never! Ask me anything but that, I hate her too much."

"The mother of your children?" exclaimed M. Jean, indignantly.

"My children!" repeated Robert, in a tone of irony.

"Yes. Do you hate them too, poor little beings."

"No. I liked them too much in former days to hate them, but I have taken an oath that I will never look on them again."

"Ah!" said the priest, mournfully, "I would rather learn you were a murderer than hear such blasphemy proceed from your mouth."

Robert did not answer, his pallor betrayed the emotion he was experiencing, and, by his contracted features, it was easy to see that a violent struggle was taking place in his heart.

"You don't know my story," he said at last, in a broken voice. "I wished to keep it to myself, but you force me to tell it to you, for I don't want you to despise me. Folks have doubtless told you, since the police have raked up all my past life,—they have told you, I say, that I deserted from my regiment, conspired against the government, and ruined and abandoned my wife after having seduced her?"

"Yes, I have been told all that, but——"

"Well, all that is true; but what people haven't told you is that I have been the victim of perfidious treachery."

"By whom have you been betrayed?"

"By whom? You spoke to me just now of a friend, of a wife. Ah, well! I have been betrayed by a man, who called himself my friend, and by a wife I adored, whatever she now dares to pretend."

"What! by your wife?"

"Yes. Just listen to this. The story is a short one, for I won't indulge in justifications or recriminations. I wished to become rich, for her sake much more than for my own; I went into business, and as I understood nothing of it I went partners with a foreigner whom I thought an honest man, but who turned out to be a villainous blackguard."

"A foreigner!" murmured M. Jean.

"Yes, a Prussian. You now understand why I should so enjoy sabring his compatriots."

"May I ask his name?"

"His name? Tichdorf, if you wish to know it."

"Ah!" said the vicar, with a gesture, the meaning of which the poacher could not guess.

"In less than three years' time," continued Robert, "this scamp made me a ruined man, and I have since learnt he enriched himself at my expense; but that is nothing. Not satisfied with ruining me, my amiable associate drew

me into a political conspiracy, which he took good care to denounce to the police. He received a good round sum for his information, and I was condemned by default; in fact, had it not been for an amnesty I should still be in England, or already at the galleys."

"How abominable! and you have never seen this man since?"

"Never, thank Providence! He had returned to Prussia, and I had no wish to go and look for him. That's the balance-sheet of friendship! Now let us turn to love affairs," said Robert, bitterly.

"Remember that you are striving to prove your own innocence, and don't slander an innocent woman," sighed M. Jean.

"An innocent woman!" sneered the poacher. "Tichdorf's treachery is nothing beside hers. She deceived me with a scamp who had been my comrade in the hussars, and whom I had welcomed to my home like a brother. I certainly did challenge him, and I killed him; but as to her, I had no time to treat her as she richly deserved, for I was obliged to fly——"

"She was not guilty—she had been unjustly accused—an anonymous letter was the cause of it—she told me everything."

"What! she had the impudence to do so! Did she also tell you that she had been deceiving me for ten years, when I discovered her infamy? Did she tell you of her underhand visits to the Foundling Hospital?"

"To the Foundling Hospital!" repeated M. Jean. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," exclaimed Robert, "that this woman who takes such a lively interest in my fate, and who has known how to make you compassionate her; I mean, I say, and I could prove it, that she betrayed me even before I was foolish enough to marry her. The child she went to see at the hospital was hers; she had concealed its birth from me, and I should have been ignorant of its existence if a friend, or an unknown enemy, had not warned me that my virtuous companion repaired every day to the Foundling Hospital, where the brat was being nursed at the expense of the Government."

"And you believed this odious slander?"

"Perfectly; for what you call slander was the exact truth. I watched this tender mother narrowly, and I saw her with my own eyes gliding towards the hospital, where you could no doubt find the record of her shame inscribed on the registers. It is useless to tell you what I suffered after this terrible discovery, but you have yet to learn how relentlessly I was pursued by fate. I went home and awaited the return of the miserable woman who had dishonoured me. I wished to confound her, make her confess her crime, kill her and then destroy myself."

"Stop, you unhappy man!"

"Why should I stop? That end would have been preferable to the one I now await. But I had no time to avenge myself. I had scarcely begun to question her than she grew pale and stammered,—the avowal was on her lips, and I only awaited it to strike the blow,—but the authorities were on my track, for I had been denounced for conspiracy that very morning, and the police were about to surround my house—one of my accomplices, the only one who was not a traitor to me, came hastily to warn me of it. I still hesitated. I wished to die, but he dragged me off. I never saw my wife again till the evening when she handed me over to the gendarmes on the banks of the Marne. Do you now understand why I refuse to see her? Can you also understand that I have sworn never to look upon my children again—her children, I should say."

"What! you dare to suspect——"

"I dare everything, and I am in the right. The woman, who deceived me

when she married me, must also have deceived me after marrying me. I have cursed her and her whole race. If anything could console me for being on the road to La Roquette, without having really incurred the penalty, it would be the assurance that I am now freed from the whole brood—and yet I was so fond of them,” continued Robert in a broken voice. “And even now—look here! when I recall the time when I jogged the elder of them on my knee, whilst the other smiled at me in his cradle, I feel quite upset——”

“God bids us pardon those who have wronged us.”

“Pardon! Never.”

M. Jean, indignant at such hard-heartedness, was about to reply by a warm remonstrance, when the door of the waiting-room opened. A warder came in and courteously reminded the priest that the regulation hour allowed for his visit was now over. The poacher rose up, bowed without further remark, and followed another warder who was waiting for him, back to his cell.

Dismayed by what he had just heard, and disturbed by the gaoler's presence, M. Jean had not courage to urge his petition any further, and silently wended his way through the long passages of the gloomy building, which were as wide, as lofty, and as full of echoes as a cathedral nave. He crossed the prison offices, and the yard, and arrived on the Boulevard de Mazas, quite bewildered by the strange statements of this strange prisoner, who thought only of recriminating, instead of defending himself. Was he speaking the truth, and was it to be believed that the unhappy woman Eugénie was more guilty than miserable? This is what the priest asked himself while he was going slowly past the prison wall, with his head bowed, when suddenly as he reached the first side street he found himself face to face with the deserted woman. She was seated on a boundary-stone, her body bent, her arms hanging by her side, while her head was thrown back, and her eyes were fixed on the roof of the house of detention barely visible above the wall. However, she soon caught sight of M. Jean, and came towards him pale and trembling: “Well?” she asked with all the strength she could command. She had at once guessed that he was on his way from Mazas, and felt certain that he had been pleading her cause with Robert.

“He still refuses to see you,” murmured M. Jean.

“Then it only remains for me to die,” said Eugénie, in a trembling voice.

“Come, madame,” continued the priest, “I want to talk to you, and it is just as well that our friends of the Rue de Charonne should not be present at our interview.” And so saying he drew her in the direction of the deserted quay, where a few weeks previously she had confided her troubles to him,

That day, the esplanade planted with scrubby trees, which extends as far as the Pont d'Austerlitz, was even more solitary than usual, for during that gloomy month of August, anxious Paris no longer strolled about by the water side. They were, therefore, able to find a seat on a bench without anyone watching them, and M. Jean, deeply affected, began to repeat, in softened terms, the charges which the poacher had brought against his wife. It cost him a good deal to touch on such a painful subject, but he would have blushed had he had recourse to any underhand device to discover the truth, and he thought it more honourable to question the woman frankly. At his first mention of Robert's jealousy, and the fatal duel which it had occasioned, Eugénie burst into tears. But she soon mastered her emotion and replied in a steady voice.

“Robert is unjust. He has forgotten that the man who slandered me betrayed him, and thus showed how far he was worthy of trust. That scoundrel, Tichdorf denounced my husband to the police, at the same time as he de-

nounced me to my husband. It is impossible to place any belief in what he said, and I should lower myself in trying to refute his statements."

"I would that the prisoner were here to hear you!" exclaimed M. Jean, struck by the simplicity of her protestations and the frankness of her tone. "But, alas!" he added, after a pause, "that is not everything."

"What else does he accuse me of, then?" asked Eugénie, bitterly.

"He spoke to me—of a child—whose birth was concealed from him—of a child you visited secretly at the Foundling Hospital."

"A child! the hospital! and he suspected me of—ah! this is too much!—and I did not think that Robert's blindness could go as far as imputing to me such infamy!"

"He listened to the tales of that Prussian. On his information he followed you, and surprised you entering the hospital. He asserts that he is certain the child was yours."

"Mine! Ah! If I had been his mother I should never have parted with him. I should have nursed him had it cost me my honour—even my life."

"Then there is such a child in existence! Is it true that you did visit one?"

"Yes, it is quite true; yes, such a child exists, or did exist at the time when Robert was obliged to leave France; but this child—this child—was his own."

"What do you say?"

"Yes; this child—a little boy—belonged to him and to an unlucky woman whom he had betrayed. It is a sad story—sadder even than mine. One day, some weeks before the catastrophe which separated me from my husband, I received a letter, begging of me to come at once to see a dying woman, who had a great favour to beg of me. I set out at once, and at the end of a long room in the Hôtel-Dieu, lying in an hospital bed, I saw a poor woman, who told me the story of her life. Robert had seduced and deserted her. For ten years she had struggled against misery. Being too poor to nurse the child she had brought into the world, she had had recourse to public charity; but she had never ceased to think of her boy, and to hope that some day she might be able to remove him from the hospital, for he had a mark by which she knew him. Attacked by a mortal disease, she now felt she would never see him again, and at her last hour thinking of the man who had ruined her——"

"Why did she not apply to him?"

"She had done so several times for many years, but Robert, whether he had any animus against her, whether he then loved me, and the remembrance of his former attachment, worried him; Robert, at all events, had never replied to her messages. She knew that he was married; no doubt she had been told I worshipped him, and worshipped my children. Mothers have their kind of inspirations, and she thought she would not beg my help in vain——"

"And I am sure she was not mistaken."

"No; I accepted the legacy she thrust upon me, and I promised her that I would watch over her son—over Robert's son. She died the next day; she had left me some papers and other proofs of her son's identity. I kept my promise. I visited the hospital in the poor woman's name, and they allowed me to see the child. I returned there several times, for each time I grew more attached to the little fellow."

"And you never thought of telling your husband what had occurred?"

"I often did think of doing so, but my courage failed me. Robert was already lending an ear to the slander of that German scoundrel, and our household was too troubled for me to give any fresh cause of quarrelling."

However, I quite understood that all this could not go on for ever, and I should certainly have revealed it to Robert; but the events you are acquainted with occurred. I was separated from my husband, and I had not the time to tell him——”

“What I myself can now reveal to him,” exclaimed M. Jean; “that is, if—if you have any proofs which enable me to establish the truth of your story.”

“Proofs are not lacking. The hospital register testifies that the child was born and abandoned in Paris at a time when I was still at school at Meaux, I have kept the certificate of birth and the paper describing the marks of identity which the unhappy mother entrusted to me.”

“But what has become of the child?”

“Alas! I cannot tell,” said Eugénie, sadly; “and if I have anything to reproach myself with, it is with regard to this poor little fellow.”

“You abandoned him then?” asked M. Jean.

“Involuntarily, I can assure you. This is what happened. My husband’s flight moved me to despair, and to heighten my misfortune, my younger child was seriously ill. I could not leave his cradle. I remained like this for a whole month, utterly overwhelmed by grief and anxiety, unable even to think about anything. However, when the first pang was over, I hastened to the hospital——”

“And the child was dead?”

“No, thank heavens; but I learnt he had been sent to the foundling establishment at Berck, in the Pas-de-Calais. He was sickly and feeble, and did not grow; and the doctors had decided to send him to the seaside, so that he might bathe and get fresh air. We were then at the beginning of spring, and he was to remain at Berck till autumn. What could I do? My own children needed my care. I could not leave Paris——”

“But later on, when the child returned in the autumn——”

“Then we had fallen into utter misery. Misfortune comes so swiftly, and a few months had sufficed to exhaust my scanty resources and estrange my few remaining friends. I was driven from the house I lived in, despoiled of everything, reduced to beg my bread from door to door, and then it was I began the wandering life which I was leading when you met me. How could I have dared to show myself again at the hospital, and even if I had had the courage to do so, what protection, what help could I have offered the poor deserted child? I gave up the idea of seeing him——”

“And you don’t know if he is still at the hospital—if he is still living even?”

“I have never tried to find out; and yet, many a time, after I had been singing at some village fête, and crossed the faubourg to reach my wretched home, many a time I was tempted to enter that building where Robert’s child was being brought up by public charity——”

“And years have elapsed since you ceased going there?”

“Three years. My husband left France in August, 1867. The child was then ten years old; I have still got his certificate of birth, which his unfortunate mother entrusted to my care on her death-bed; for the little fellow had been duly registered before being taken to the foundling hospital. I also have a paper on which she has enumerated all the marks which might facilitate his identification, and these marks agree with those recorded on the books of the authorities.”

“Then it would be easy to compare, and to prove to your husband that you have been slandered.”

"Certainly, and had I previously known that he accused me of such odious deception, I should not have waited till now to justify myself."

"Well, I will take upon myself to plead your cause with him, and I think I may promise you that I shall win the fight. Only, you must trust me with those documents——"

"Here they are," said Eugénie, excitedly, as she drew from her bodice a little, well worn case. "I have never ceased carrying them about my person—a street singer, you know, has no furniture in which she can lock up her belongings."

"I accept them, and will make early use of them," replied the curé, placing the papers in his pocket book. "For to-day, the visiting hour is over; besides I want to call on our friends in the Rue de Charonne."

"You will find them in a sad way—their business doesn't prosper—and worse than that, although Madame Cormier has not confided her husband's worries to me, I know that they are very great. And I'll confess to you, that had I not been lucky enough to meet you, I meant to write unknown to them, and beg of you to come. You are so kind, that I felt sure you would do all you could to help them, for they're worthy people."

"I will go at once," said M. Jean.

"Perhaps it will be better for me not to accompany you," murmured the poacher's wife, blushing.

The priest guessed she wished to tarry near the prison, and gaze once more at the dark walls which separated her from her husband.

"Be sensible," he said gently, "I shall return to Charly after seeing Monsieur Cormier, but to-morrow I shall come back to Paris; I will then go to the hospital and learn if the child is living, and when I have verified your statements I will see your husband, and I hope that I shall be able to bring you good news."

Thereupon, without waiting for any thanks, M. Jean rose up and walked off towards the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. He was greatly affected, and he blessed Providence for having procured him this meeting; for he had felt relieved of a great weight since he had heard Eugénie's explanations; he did not doubt her sincerity, and even before listening to her it had been dreadfully repugnant to him to believe her guilty. He decided that he would tell M. de la Chanterie this comforting story, and talk it over with him, so as to draw from it such inferences as might be in the poacher's favour.

It is not a far cry from the Pont d'Austerlitz to the Rue de Charonne, and the priest, who walked fast, soon reached the entrance of the large courtyard, at the further end of which Antoine Cormier resided. The door of the shop was open, and, as M. Jean approached, he saw the cabinet-maker's wife leaning against a wardrobe. He guessed she was crying, and he stopped short, greatly perplexed, for he hardly liked to surprise her in the midst of her grief, and yet he wished to ask her the cause of it, so as to supply a remedy. He ended by coughing, whereupon Louise Cormier turned round, and having recognised him came forward, striving hard to conceal her tears.

"Ah! your reverence," she said, in an husky voice, "how glad Antoine will be to see you—although you arrive at a sad time—but never mind, your visit will do him good, without reckoning that you may be able to give him some good advice."

"Advice and help too, my dear lady, and I hope that he won't refuse either, for I shall offer him both most willingly."

"Oh! he knows that—and so do I—we know your kindness, and we are certain that if it only depended upon you—but we are in such a frightful position—that I fear nothing you could do would help us out of it."

M. Jean smiled. He guessed that Louise had great faith in his kind intentions; but she doubted the length of his purse. "What is amiss then?" he asked, gently.

"Our very existence and that of our poor children is at stake," murmured Antoine Cormier's wife, stifling a sob. "We are threatened with being sold up, our stock-in-trade is already seized, and our furniture about to be so too; and in a few days, if we don't find means of paying our creditor, we shall be turned into the street. Ah! if it were only a matter of my husband and myself! Antoine would begin again as a journeyman; I have courage, and would find needle-work. But, the little ones—what will become of them—Good heavens!"

"And you have waited till you are reduced to such extremities before telling me about your trouble?" exclaimed M. Jean, in a reproachful, but affectionate, tone.

"I wished to write to you, but Antoine foiled my doing so. He told me it was useless to worry you —."

"As I was not in a position to assist you, eh? I recognise your husband's delicacy of feeling, and he had, indeed, every reason to think that a poor, country priest could not have much money at his disposal. He was not far wrong; for, during the last thirty years, I have not practised economy. I place my money at the command of the poor. But, fortunately, I know some people who are both rich and generous, and who will be thankful for the opportunity of performing a kind action."

"What?" exclaimed the workman's wife, blushing with emotion, "You might be able to find someone who —; but no, it is impossible. We owe too much; so little time now remains to us —."

"Who knows? Go on with your story."

"Well, three months ago Antoine bought some wood on credit. At that time he was in a fair way of business; he had orders to execute—bills to be paid, but then the war came. Those who owed us money did not pay, and bills came in as thick as hail, and creditors would not wait to be paid. Then Antoine borrowed from a money-lender, at high interest, but he hoped the war would soon be over, and that trade would revive. However, everything has gone from bad to worse, and now we are dreadfully in debt, and haven't a copper to pay with. Besides, expenses have doubled the original debt; and if at the end of the month we haven't collected four thousand, seven hundred and odd francs, it will be all over with us."

"But the end of the month is the day after to-morrow."

"Yes; and between now and then where can we possibly find so much money? If our creditor only had a little heart; but no, he is the hardest fisted man in the world. He is well known in the faubourg, where he has ruined a number of poor folks already."

"Never mind, my dear lady, Tell me his name, and his address, and I will go —"

"There he is," said Louise Cormier, pointing towards the door, which separated the shop from the back room in which the priest had been received on the occasion of his first visit with Marcel. "Antoine is with him—with them, I should say—for the money lender brings his partner with him. My husband is begging them to give him time, and I know that they are refusing to do so. There! Just listen!"

She was silent for a minute, and some voices were heard talking. Evidently the debtor and his creditors were at variance. Indeed, almost immediately, the door was thrown open; and M. Jean found himself face to face, with two persons whom he knew very well indeed, by sight.

The first was M. Vétillet, the assessor of the mayor of Charly-sous-bois, and a retired merchant; at least, that was how he styled himself on his visiting cards. He might, however, have suppressed the word "retired," for he was still on active service; and had merely changed the nature of the merchandise in which he dealt. It had once been hosiery, whereas now it was money. It is true that his acquaintances at Charly were ignorant of this, for he only exercised his profession as an usurer in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, where he went by the name of "Father Chafouin," and where he was able to fleece people, without compromising his municipal dignity. Beyond the fortifications he became Assessor and Monsieur Vétillet again, forsooth a very important personage.

The priest, who had certainly never suspected that the retired hosier practised usury in Paris, and went by an alias so as to conceal his identity, the priest drew back with surprise on seeing him. By doing so, he made way for a second individual, who followed closely at Vétillet's heels, and who, of course, was the partner, that Louise Cormier had just mentioned. M. Jean's stupefaction was boundless, when he saw that this personage was none other than Digonnard, the democrat, who held forth so eloquently against the men of wealth who grew fat on the sweat of the people.

The two confederates, greatly astonished on perceiving the village priest, looked at him mistrustfully, and seemed to be asking themselves whether their debtor had not laid a trap for them by bringing them face to face with the curé of Charly. Cormier, red with anger, and his wife, pale with emotion, completed the picture.

The chemist, who was a man of some resolution, wished to get out of the business by making off. He roughly pushed his acolyte Vétillet, who was not walking fast enough, and the well-matched partners would, doubtless, have escaped any explanation, had not their victim loudly called out:

"Ah, your reverence, you have come just in the nick of time, and if you have never seen 'short time' money-lenders before you may take a good look at these gentlemen."

M. Jean was still inclined to doubt the rascality of his two parishioners, but the furious workman was in such a state of indignation, that he really "*dotted his i's*," as the saying goes; and the priest had to yield to evidence. Louise looked imploringly at her husband, Vétillet scratched his nose energetically, and Digonnard pretended to be buttoning up his great-coat, as if he wished to wrap himself in his virtue, light as such clothing might be.

"I must introduce you to old Father Chafouin," continued Cormier; "an honourable money-lender, who lent me three thousand francs at five per cent.—per month, remember—and who is going to sell me up if by the day after to-morrow I don't pay him capital, interest, and law expenses."

"Oh, sir," murmured the priest, turning towards the mayor's assessor, "you will never do that, for you would not have it said in the neighbourhood——"

"And this one," continued the workman, brimming over with indignation, "is the kind friend who shares the loaf with old Chafouin, and makes the round of all the cafés in the faubourg every Monday, preaching equality and fraternity——"

"And I am proud of doing so," said Digonnard impudently; "but I don't

see how our affairs concern this gentleman. Besides, if you have fetched him here to intimidate my partner and myself, I am happy to tell you that you have failed in your intention, for we don't at all trouble ourselves as to the opinions of the clergy."

"No, we don't trouble ourselves in the least," insisted Vétillet, who took courage on seeing that his comrade showed fight.

"Perhaps the opinion of your fellow-townsmen at Charly will affect you more nearly," said M. Jean gently.

"What! these money-grabbers come from Charly?" exclaimed the workman.

"Yes, this gentleman is the assessor to the mayor, and that gentleman is the chemist who lives in the High Street, not far from Jacqueline's house," said the vicar somewhat maliciously.

"Ah, I wish I had only known it. I would have trumpeted it well at old Ledoux', when I went to see the little chap there; but there is not the least fear of the gentlemen giving their real addresses to those they fleece. To think that I took them merely for ordinary sharpers!"

"Antoine, I beg of you," urged Louise.

"All right! Now that I know them, all the faubourg shall learn this evening that old Chafouin and his pal are respected suburban shopkeepers; they will ruin me and my wife and the brats, but as soon as I've earned a little cash I shall go and set up as a cabinet-maker at Charly, and tell all the village the story. I will jolly well make them pay for it!"

"I don't care a fig," muttered Digonnard, who tried to put a bold face on the matter, "I have a clear conscience."

"Yes, we have a clear conscience," echoed Vétillet.

"Yes! let us talk about your conscience, it evidently did not prevent your practising usury."

"It isn't prohibited, I fancy, to make something out of one's capital," said the chemist.

"It is the most legitimate thing in the world," added the assessor.

"Legitimate! at sixty per cent. per annum. That is coming it hot!"

"Money is merchandise, my worthy friend, and if you had the least notion of political economy, I could prove to you——"

"Nonsense! go and tell that in the drinking shops of the neighbourhood, where you jaw every week about the tyranny of hateful capitalists."

"I don't share on this point the opinions of Proudhon, whom I otherwise respect," so Digonnard gravely declared.

"Nor I either," squeaked Vétillet, who was quite ignorant as to whom Proudhon might be. Perhaps he thought that the great apostle of French socialism was some legal practitioner.

"And to think you call yourself a regular democrat!" cried Cormier, becoming more and more exasperated, "to think that you go about proclaiming that the social position of the working classes ought to be improved! Ah! confound it, if I did not respect his reverence's presence here, I——"

"Compose yourself, I entreat you, my dear friend," said the priest, placing his hand on Cormier's arm, which had been raised as if to strike the dissentient Proudhonian, "compose yourself, and leave me to settle the affair with these gentlemen."

"You are right, they are not worth punching, and I want to spare you any annoyance, but let them be off at once, or else——"

"Very good, we are going off, but we are not a bit afraid of you," retorted Digonnard, after having prudently retreated in the direction of the yard.

"We fear nobody, and you will hear of us again," echoed Vétillet who had executed the same manœuvre.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," began M. Jean, "but before you leave I wish to arrange —"

"There is nothing to arrange," interrupted the chemist roughly; "the debt amounts to 4713 francs and 75 centimes, and as I don't imagine that you mean to pay it —"

"You are mistaken, sir! Such is my exact intention," said the priest of Charly composedly.

"Ah! bah! what! you mean to—— Yes, only it isn't merely a question as to whether you *mean* to do so, but whether you *can* do so."

"The amount will be paid to you on the day after to-morrow."

"What guarantees shall we have of that?" asked Vétillet sharply.

"My promise, sir," replied M. Jean simply.

The two cronies exchanged glances, as if to sound each other. In reality, they had no wish to quarrel with the priest, for they both cared for public opinion at Charly, and they quite realised that it depended merely on M. Jean to destroy their reputation in the village.

"That is another matter," muttered Digonnard, "and if my partner is willing——"

"I am quite willing to grant the delay that his reverence desires," Vétillet immediately replied. "The more willingly as we cannot sell up here sooner" was his mental reservation.

"I am obliged to you, gentlemen," said M. Jean; "and I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again on the day after to-morrow before noon."

This was a polite way of asking them to retire, and as they did not care to linger within reach of Antoine Cormier's pugnacious fists, they speedily left the place. "Where will he get the money to pay us with, and *will* he pay us?" asked Vétillet of Digonnard, as they crossed the yard.

"Oh! he will pay right enough," answered the chemist, "and he'll manage it easily. All these fellows of the cloth are rolling in wealth. I'll bet that this one has got his hands on some old devotee's inheritance."

Whilst these honourable personages were on their way up the street, the good priest had to contend with Louise's expressions of gratitude, and Antoine's obstinacy in refusing the proffered help. "No," said the cabinetmaker, "no, I do not see why you should have to pinch yourself for us—pray don't trouble yourself—we will work hard—a man may have a tumble, but he picks himself up again—however, we are none the less grateful to you."

"You owe me no gratitude, my friend," interrupted M. Jean, "and you may accept this little service without the least scruple. The person who will hand me this sum to get you out of your embarrassment won't give it to you, he will lend it, and I am certain you will pay him back again, some day or other."

"If I thought it were really so—if I could feel sure you would not be pinching yourself for me——"

"I can assure you that I have spoken truly, my friend."

"Then, I accept!" exclaimed Cormier, shaking the priest's hand warmly.

"Thank you, in my children's name," murmured Louise.

"And now," continued the priest, "I must leave you, for I am expected at Charly, and I carry good news with me. I have just seen the poor woman, in whom we are all so interested, and she has told me something, which will, perhaps, enable me to reconcile her with her husband. You have nothing further to fear from those bad men. I can, therefore, leave you. I have not lost my time to-day."

IX.

ON that same day, the last but one of the month of August while M. Jean was coming to an explanation with Antoine Cormier's creditors, Julien de la Chanterie took, with Dr. Minard's permission, his first airing in the Park of Chasseneuil. His arm which had been so badly damaged by Miraut de Saint Avertin's sword, his arm freed at last from all kind of bandages, was now perfectly serviceable, and he made use of it to pick some flowers for Gabrielle.

Not that Mademoiselle de Brannes was present to witness the efforts of the convalescent. Her father had taken her off that morning to Paris, where he had been summoned by the sad necessities of that eventful war.

Since the beginning of the campaign, fortune had set in so decidedly against the French, that the prospect of a siege of Paris was already being discussed, and the count, who was firmly determined not to fly on the enemy's approach, had various arrangements to make at his mansion on the Quai d'Orsay, where he meant to take up his residence should the Germans invest Paris. However, on this occasion, the principal object of his visit to the capital was to inquire at the War Office for news concerning the movements of the army.

Henri de Brannes, his only son, had, fortunately for him, not been employed on the staff of the frontier force, known as the Army of the Rhine, a piece of luck which the young captain had considered to be the greatest possible misfortune. Whilst most of his comrades were fighting at Reichshoffen or Gravelotte, he had remained with a reserve corps, which had started very late in the day for the camp of Chalons. However, after the disastrous issue of the battles fought round Metz, this corps at last received its marching-orders, and it was known that for several days past, it had been moving towards the North-East of France.

What Frenchman does not remember that awful week, when men met each other with anxious looks, when mothers opened the newspapers with anguish? It was certainly the most terrible week of that awful month, each Sunday of which brought Paris the news of a fresh defeat.

Although Julien's sufferings were not of the same nature as those which had fallen to the share of his uncle, they were none the less cruel. Confined for more than forty days to his bed, as Doctor Minard had predicted, the poor fellow cursed the fatality, which prevented his setting out with the Mobile Guard and longed to be able to join it.

It would be rash to say that his charming cousin's presence had not alleviated his regrets, still, all the same, as the situation grew worse and worse Julien was maddened at being reduced to inaction. The hope of fighting for his country had returned to him ever since his wound had begun to heal; but just at that moment the 7th battalion, to which he belonged, received orders to return to Paris; and he was obliged to await its advent there in miserable inaction.

Gabrielle, to tell the truth, did not complain of this delay, although, like a brave girl, she had sufficient strength of mind not to try and turn Julien from his path of duty. Her brother was already on active service, and her betrothed lover would shortly find himself under fire. She prayed to Providence for them and France, sacrificing, without complaint, her dearest affections to her country; whilst citizens Digouard and Vétillet profited by the general misfortunes to make their money yield a yet higher rate of interest.

Unlike these gentlemen, La Chanterie was so greatly preoccupied by the

reverses of the French army, that he hardly gave any further thought to the poacher's case. Even M. Wassmann and his very equivocal conduct, had escaped from his memory. He spent the greater part of his time in reassuring his uncle and cousin, and the remainder in feverishly conning the newspapers in which he seldom found anything but nonsense.

On the evening of his first airing, while walking about the garden, he perused a paper, which tried to prove, with admirable gravity, that as the Prussians were born in a flat country their feet were not suited to long marches; that they would be quite worn out after about thirty halts, and be totally annihilated as soon as they made their appearance on the "Catalaunical fields," as journalists then gushingly called the plains of the Champagne, where Attila's hordes were exterminated in by-gone ages. Many readers, alas! on the eve of the final catastrophe, still lent a willing ear to these idiotic fallacies, but Julien, who had no belief in the Catalaunical fields, shrugged his shoulders, and was throwing down the paper in disgust, when he suddenly saw the curé of of Charly approaching him along the wide garden walk. Somewhat surprised at receiving a visit from M. Jean, at a time of day when he was not in the habit of calling—Julien went forward to meet him. He feared that something was amiss, and indeed, at that time, one lived from day to day in expectation of bad news.

"I have just come from Paris," said M. Jean, after shaking hands with Julien, "and I come to tell you——"

"Has my uncle learnt any fresh bad news at the War Office?" asked Julien.

"Not that I am aware of. I have not had the honour of meeting the count, but I heard, on the contrary, that the last despatches were good ones. It is asserted that a great battle is imminent, but everyone is full of hope, and perhaps, at this very moment, the safety of France is being decided."

"God grant it! France has great need of his protection; but you have something to tell me——"

"I wanted to speak to you about the poacher's wife. Her misfortunes interest me greatly, in spite of all these disasters."

"And I quite reproach myself with having thought so little of her during these past weeks. How is her husband's case progressing?"

"It is in just the same state as before, I believe, and nothing seems to indicate that the trial is approaching. Besides, the delay in sending him to the Assizes is to his advantage, for his conviction is only too probable——"

"I myself can't see how he can escape now that M. Wassmann's innocence is fully proved—for it is, is it not?"

"Completely so, as far as I can see. The conduct of my neighbour has lately been quite above suspicion; I am particularly touched by his liberality towards my pupil Marcel and by the great sympathy he shows for our dear country, though it is not his own native land."

"Yes; people have told me that he has done a great deal for the child and showed marked hostility to Prussia. Many curious things influenced me against him, but I am beginning to lose my prejudices. Excuse me, however, I have again interrupted you—you were saying that Robert's wife——"

"She has at last confided her full story to me. I now know the reason of her husband's unjust enmity, and I have the means of reconciling them within my grasp. Perhaps the very documents she has provided me with may serve to soften her judges."

"What information?" asked Julien, somewhat surprised.

"The certificate of the birth of a boy who was placed some years ago in

the Foundling Hospital, and who is a son of Robert's, together with some papers containing proofs of the child's identity. I should have gone straight to the hospital had I not been recalled here by my ecclesiastical duties ; to-morrow I shall return to Paris and——"

"Excuse me, your reverence, but I don't quite understand what connection there can be——"

"You are right, I am talking foolishly and forgot that I had not explained matters to you. But it is a most romantic story, and I can tell it you more easily by showing you these papers," said M. Jean, taking his pocket-book and drawing out the packet which had been given him by Eugénie.

Julien watched him with mingled curiosity and surprise.

"Here is the certificate of birth," continued the priest, "let's see 'Municipal Registry Offices of the Twelfth Arrondissement, a child of the male sex, born in Paris, 27th October, 1857, father and mother unknown ; given name of—Marcel.'"

"Marcel !" repeated M. Jean, "it is a most singular coincidence."

"Why, it is your pupil's certificate of birth," exclaimed Julien. "Jacqueline Ledoux had a similar certificate given her by the Hospital Board. She showed it to me the other day, and I perfectly well remember that the date of birth was the same, and the names of the witnesses also. There is no longer the least doubt but what Marcel is Robert's son."

"Ah ! good Heavens ! Then the poor child has a criminal for his father, a man whom the law is about to condemn to ——"

M. Jean stopped short, for the count's valet had just appeared on the terrace ; he now came forward so fast that he must be bringing some very urgent news.

"What is the matter, Joseph ?" asked M. de la Chanterie.

"His reverence is waiting for some one who is dying," said the servant, "the messenger came from Madame Ledoux."

"Madame Ledoux ! Why, I saw her this morning in perfect health."

"It is her neighbour, Mademoiselle Rose, the lady who keeps the café. She is dying and has asked for a priest."

"Dying ! God grant that I may reach her in time," exclaimed M. Jean.

"I will go with you, your reverence !" said Julien.

"What, my dear boy, you wish to be present at so sad a time," said M. Jean, "you yourself are only just convalescent ?"

"Oh ! I am well enough to go with you, and besides this news seems extraordinary to me—the dying woman is that Mademoiselle Rose, whose evidence was so decisive—she was not at all ill—who knows whether remorse——"

"Your imagination leads you too far. This poor woman has had nervous attacks for some time past, and it is quite possible that her condition has been aggravated by this business ; still as you wish to accompany me, let us set out at once, please."

M. de la Chanterie followed the priest, who walked quickly towards the garden-gate. Just as they reached it, there passed along the road a very stylish dog-cart, drawn by a splendid trotter, which went like lightning, and which was driven by M. Wassmann in person.

"Where is he off to ?" Julien wondered, full of vague suspicion as to the German's destination ; "This isn't the time for his usual drive, one would think he was taking himself out of the way."

The young fellow kept these venturesome speculations to himself, and, as the good priest, who was collecting his thoughts for the exercise of his holy office, did not appear to have seen the vehicle, no mention of M. Wassmann

was made. Besides, it was not far from the château to Mademoiselle Rose's café, and in a few minutes they reached the Grand Vainqueur, where a group of gossips stood in front of the doorway. Jacqueline Ledoux was on the threshold, and seeing M. Jean from afar, she began to gesticulate, and to call out to the inquisitive chatterers to make way for him.

"What has happened?" asked the priest.

"Ah! sir," lamented the good woman, "it was almost like a thunder-stroke—she had her usual attack yesterday at nine o'clock—her nerves always came on at that time—but to day she was wonderfully well; and then all of a sudden she turned quite green; cramps came on—almost like cholera—and now the doctor says she may go off at any moment."

"Monsieur Minard is here, then?"

"To be sure he is. I sent for him at once, and he has been drugging her for a whole hour, but it does not do the poor creature the least good."

"And she expressed a wish to see me?"

"Twenty minutes ago, she spoke of confessing herself. Ah, she realises very well she is about to die."

"Take me to her," said M. Jean quickly.

"Ah! it isn't far. Her room is behind the counter."

Thereupon the market-gardener's wife hastily led the priest across the café, where the celebrated games of dominos were played every evening by the no less celebrated magnates of Charly.

The daylight was waning, and the Café du Grand Vainqueur, usually so noisy and brilliantly illuminated, presented a most melancholy appearance. Not a single customer sat on the stools upholstered in Utrecht velvet, nor a single player stood at the billiard-table. Julien, who had never been in the café before, looked curiously at this deserted room, where the silence was only broken by the monotonous tic-tac of the clock pendulum. He followed the priest, whom Jacqueline led into the bedroom, and there beheld a mournful sight.

On a bed which had not been turned down, the unhappy Rose was writhing in terrible convulsions. The doctor, standing at the bedside, was trying to make her swallow a few drops of a narcotic potion, and could not succeed in doing so, for her jaws were firmly clenched. The landlady was no longer recognisable; death had already set its mark on her livid face. Her eyes alone seemed alive. They sparkled brilliantly when the dying woman saw the priest, and she even extended her hands towards him, as if to entreat something of him; then a rattling sound came from her chest; she tried to sit up on the bed, but fell back again, overcome by agony.

The doctor turned round, and seeing M. Jean, he left the bedside with a haste which seemed to imply, "Science can do no more for this poor woman, and if religion can soften her last moments, the time has come for you to exhort her to die bravely." The priest understood the doctor's gesture, and quickly approached the bedside.

"You have sent for me, mademoiselle?" he said, leaning towards the dying woman.

"Yes," answered Rose in a stifling voice; "I wished to—yes, I wished to tell you—confess to you——"

"I am ready to hear your confession. Speak."

"Yes, I will try; it is something that seems to choke me—and—it seems as if I should feel comforted—when you have listened to me——"

Julien and M. Minard understood, and retired to the other end of the room. Jacqueline had not dared to go beyond the door.

"What is the matter with her, doctor?" asked the young advocate in a low voice.

"I can't tell as yet, but it is certainly all up with her."

"What! you have given up all hope?"

"I have tried the most energetic remedies, but they were all quite powerless,—in a few minutes, a fresh spasm will carry her off."

"It's inexplicable, and her symptoms are not those of fever."

"Certainly not."

"Then what causes them?"

"I don't like to say; it would be too serious."

"Poison, you think?"

"I repeat that I have not, and cannot have the least certainty,—a post-mortem examination alone could make me sure about it. However, the extraordinary phenomenon which I have witnessed for the last hour is such as would be produced by the administration of strychnine."

"Ah! my presentiments did not deceive me then. She has killed herself, or been murdered."

"I may add, that if, as everything inclines me to believe, we really have to deal with strychnine, this substance must have been administered in a most powerful dose, for I have but rarely seen such a terrible effect produced by it."

"But you ought to have questioned this woman, and asked her——"

"No doubt. But unfortunately when I arrived, she was already too far gone to answer connectedly, and I almost doubt her being able to confess, for ——"

At this moment a piercing shriek, interrupted M. Minard. The sick woman was sitting upright, as if she had been galvanized by an electric shock, her hair bristled on her head, her eyes stared wildly towards the door, whilst her mouth was twisted by frightful convulsions. M. Jean was holding her up, and the doctor ran forward to assist him in doing so. Julien, struck with horror, remained a distant spectator of this frightful scene. A moment of dismal silence ensued. Nothing was heard but the ticking of the café clock, which continued to mark the last seconds of Rose's life. Suddenly, the dying woman, tore herself away from the supporting arms around her, and leaning forward as if listening, she exclaimed in a voice which hissed as it were between her tightly clenched teeth: "Stop it! that noise is killing me—stop the clock—that I may die in peace—that noise—always that noise—Ah! God is punishing me ——"

"God is merciful" murmured M. Jean, "offer him your repentance, and he will forgive your faults ——"

"No, no—it is too late—to repair the wrong I have done—if I could speak—but strength fails me—I am choking."

The unhappy woman grew stiff in a final spasm, her eyes clouded, and the last gasp of breath came from her pallid lips.

"It is all over," said the doctor in a whisper, and he laid her head gently upon the pillow.

The priest fell on his knees by the bed-side and began to pray, whilst M. Minard drew Julien out of the room. Jacqueline hurried into the street, giving way to loud lamentations, which were taken up in chorus by all the assembled gossips.

"That's a strange death," said the doctor, looking at M. de la Chanterie.

"So strange that it seems indispensable to me to hold an inquest and inquire into the cause of it," said Julien warmly.

"I mean to do so; but in these matters you can't shew too much prudence;

and, before pushing things too far, I think it will be best to collect some information. It is as well to know first of all whether it may have been a case of suicide."

"I don't in the least believe that it was."

"But a case of poisoning seems hard to explain. Nobody had any interest in ridding themselves of a woman who owned nothing excepting this modest establishment."

"Crimes are not always caused by cupidity," murmured Julien.

"Whatever it may be, I am going at once to the mayor's," answered the doctor, "to give notice of the death, and ask leave to perform a post-mortem examination; I shall also call at the chemist's, to know if he has made any error in making up my prescriptions. Digonnard knows his business; but for some time past especially, he has worried his brain too much with politics, and he is quite capable of having made a blunder."

"You will oblige me greatly by informing me as to the result of your inquiries, my dear doctor."

"I will call at the château during the evening," said M. Minard; whereupon Julien warmly shook his hand, and then, in deep thought, remained waiting for M. Jean, who was praying for the soul of the dead woman.

X.

IN those troublous times, the living had no leisure to occupy themselves with the dead, and the sad end of the landlady of the Grand Vainqueur did not make much of a stir in Charly. Rose was only regretted by her neighbour, Jacqueline Ledoux. At any other time no doubt the faithful customers of the café, which she kept so well, would have spared a tear for her memory, as her sudden death would have deprived them of their daily games of dominoes; but these gentlemen for the time being had something besides dominoes to think about.

The disaster of Sedan, followed by a Revolution, had burst upon France, and the four cronies were on their way to higher destinies.

Digonnard was busy organising a club at Charly, and anticipated that he would be elected as a representative of the people. Vétillet was canvassing for the mayoralty, although he had been nominated assessor by the late government, while Cruchot the vet. was contracting to supply the government with horses, and the huissier Verduron petitioned to be appointed a justice of the peace. As to the worthy people of the place who did not wish to enrich themselves by their country's disasters, they were simply terrified, and they had no inclination to worry over private misfortunes.

The doctor had sent in his report, in which it was set forth, as had been supposed, that Mademoiselle Rose Jourdain had succumbed to poisoning by strychnine. However, he had not been able to ascertain whence the strychnine had come. The chemist had sold none; his books bore witness to the fact. M. Minard concluded that death was the result of suicide, and his conclusions were readily accepted by the public prosecutor, who was but little inclined to start any criminal inquiries. The priest shared in the doctor's opinion, and was not far from thinking that remorse at having committed some misdeed or other had prompted the unhappy woman to destroy herself. However, as everything went to prove that M. Vassmann was no ways implicated in the keeper's murder, he did not at all suspect the deceased woman of perjury. Besides, immediately after Rose's death, he found herself very busy.

He wished above everything to get Cormier out of the usurers' clutches, and he succeeded in doing so. M. de Brannes lent the sum that was required and the cabinetmaker was able to satisfy the suburban vultures.

M. Jean had yet another good work to perform, that of reconciling the poacher with his wife; but various complications arose in this direction. Marcel was Robert's son, and this unexpected discovery greatly modified the situation. Agreeing in this respect with M. de la Chanterie, the curé thought it best to keep silent for the present respecting the boy's parentage, or at any rate not to mention the subject to the Ledoux, who would have told the story all over the village. And, indeed, if as everything seemed to indicate, the poacher was convicted and condemned it was as well that the parentage of the poor little foundling should remain a secret. M. Jean intended to take Marcel to Paris, so that Louise might recognise him, and then, after this decisive test, to visit the prisoner, tell him the truth, and induce him to see his wife. He also wished to interview the examining magistrate, to tell him all that had occurred at Charly of late, including the tragical demise of the unfortunate woman Rose.

He had, however, failed to take military and political events into account. During the gloomy days which preceded the 4th September, he was kept at Charly, and scarcely found time to take Antoine Cormier the money he needed. Then during the following days, there was no hope of his finding the magistrate ready to listen to an anecdotal story. All business in Paris was suspended in expectation of an attack by the enemy; even the course of the law was interrupted; and at a moment when France seemed to be agonising, it would have been folly to try and influence a judge in favour of a culprit who was of no especial interest. M. Jean, therefore, abstained from making any effort in this direction, and he was in the right.

Julien himself, took no further steps; indeed, he was utterly absorbed by other cares. His uncle and cousin had left Chasseneuil, and taken up their abode at their Paris mansion, where, five days after the battle of Sedan, Henri de Brannes arrived, worn out by fatigue, wounded in his arm and his head, in fact, almost in a dying condition. The gallant captain had succeeded in breaking through the German lines, and joining Vinoy's corps which was retiring by forced marches upon Paris; more lucky than many another man, he had succeeded in seeing his father and sister once more, but the doctors had hardly any hopes of saving his life. Julien, who was deeply attached to his cousin, spent his nights watching by his bed side, and his days in travelling backwards and forwards on the Vincennes railway line, for he had undertaken to remove all objects of value from the château. The count had a great many precious *objets d'art* at his country residence, and he wished to save them from German greed. But little time was left, for the enemy was rapidly approaching; and besides, Julien hastened the more, as he longed to join his battalion, which was then encamped near by.

On September 15, he set out for Charly, fully expecting that this would be his last trip to the village. The army of the Crown Prince of Prussia was but two marches distant, and there was a rumour that Uhlans had already been seen on the plain of Villiers.

The young lawyer had already donned his uniform as a Garde Mobile, and he meant to profit by this last excursion, to make a short military reconnaissance in the neighbourhood of the village. He wished to look about the place, before it was overrun by the Germans, so as to see at what points they could be most easily surprised when they were encamped there. Charly happened to be situated exactly on the borders of the zone, protected by the

fire of the outlying forts, and everything seemed to show that a good deal of outpost skirmishing would take place in the vicinity.

Julien had communicated his plan to his friends, Fabrègue and Du Tremblay, who were serving in a corps of *Francs Tireurs*, and he had given them an appointment at the château, so that they might explore the country with him. He had no doubt but what later on they would make some night expeditions, in which he trusted he might at times be able to join them.

On the previous evening he had sent to Paris a final consignment of things of value from the château, and it now only remained for him to give his parting orders to the two keepers left in charge of the property. He expected to get through this business quickly, and in the afternoon he meant to explore the surrounding country with his comrades.

On arriving on the château, he was agreeably surprised to meet M. Jean, who having been warned that Julien would call that day, had determined to have a chat with him. They exchanged cordial greetings, and then began to discuss the news of the day, both from a general and personal point of view. Julien told the priest that Paris was prepared for a desperate resistance, and that his unfortunate cousin Henri was lying between life and death. The curé on his side told Julien that the Prussian scouts had already passed Emerainville, and might at any moment appear on the banks of the Marne. Then he began to speak of Marcel, and the poacher's case.

"What will become of the unhappy man?" sighed M. Jean. "There is every probability that no juries will be called during the siege. He will remain in prison ever so long before being tried, and really I don't know what to do about this poor child, supposed to be his. I have not yet been able to make up my mind about seeing Robert since I learnt that——"

"How has Monsieur Wassmann been behaving of late?" interrupted La Chanterie with a frown. His suspicions had suddenly returned to him without his quite knowing why.

"He has behaved quite straightforwardly. He expressed great grief on hearing of our defeat at Sedan, and declared to several people of the neighbourhood, and to myself, that he should remain at Charly. It seems that a foreign legion is being formed, which is to be called the Legion of the Friends of France, and he means to enlist in it."

"Is he here now?" asked Julien.

"I think so, for I saw him pass by in his carriage yesterday. He was returning from Paris with his daughter. I was told just now, too, that he had been riding this morning along the banks of the Marne. He ought certainly to have returned home by now."

"Oh! I have not the least wish to pay him a visit, and if I inquire as to his doings, it is because I can't get rid of the thought that he is a traitor."

"Don't forget, my dear boy, that you also thought that he was Michel's murderer."

"It is not yet clearly proved to me that I was wrong, and with this thought in mind, I think that I had better trust you afresh with the two halves of the letter, which may some day serve to clear up the mystery. I always carry them upon my person, and if I happened to be killed, God knows into whose hands they would fall."

"You will not be killed, I am sure I hope not, but—but what does that child want, who is standing before the gate making signs to us?"

The curé and Julien were chatting in the court-yard of the château, and a few paces in front of them, standing in the road, there was a dirty little

fellow in rags, beckoning to them. Much surprised at the pantomime which was being enacted, they went towards him.

"Do you *be* the officer?" asked the ragamuffin of La Chanterie.

"What officer?"

"The gentleman in uniform who's arrived at the château."

"Yes, what do you want with the gentleman in uniform?"

"To give him this." So saying the child held out a letter, and as soon as Julien took it hurried off as quickly as he could.

"What does this mean?" muttered Julien, who turned and turned the letter, which the ragged messenger had almost thrust into his hands.

"I don't know the child," said the priest; he does not belong to Charly; no doubt he is some beggar boy, whom the person writing to you met on the high road."

"Yes, but who is the person?"

"You will ascertain that by opening the letter."

"Have I a right to open it? Nothing proves that it is meant for me."

"What?"

"No; look, there is no name on the envelope."

"True. Really it is a curious way to correspond. But on reflection it, seems to me that this letter can only be for you. Do you remember what the little rascal said? 'the gentleman in uniform who has arrived at the château; now that is certainly you, and nobody else.'"

"I believe you are right, and so much the worse for the writer, if the boy has made a blunder. I am not responsible for his errors; and if there is any indiscretion on my part in opening this note, you are a witness, your reverence, that the indiscretion is involuntary.

Having thus calmed his scruples, M. de la Chanterie tore open the envelope, and hardly had he glanced at the letter it contained, than his face expressed the warmest surprise. M. Jean, who was watching him with natural curiosity, saw him quickly unbutton his uniform overcoat, and draw from its depths a pocket-book, whence he took a paper, which he began to examine most carefully.

"Just see," cried Julien at last, "it is the same writing;" and, so saying, he displayed side by side the note which he had just received, and the one which had served to ram down the charge of the murderer's gun.

"Ah!" said the priest, "Providence has at length come to our aid, and we shall now know ____"

"Perhaps; but there is no signature."

"That is funny; but to whom is the letter written?"

"Impossible to tell, there is no 'sir,' or 'dear friend,' or any other formula."

"At any rate the sense must tell us ____"

"I hope so. Listen," said Julien, and he read as follows:—"Since you left, I am without any news of you. What has become of you in the midst of these terrible events? I do not know whether you have returned, I do not even know if you are still alive. Everything is hidden from me. I never go out alone, I am forbidden to speak to anyone whatever. The people about me are paid to spy on me; I am a prisoner and undergo the torture of a thousand deaths. When will my martyrdom end? Soon doubtless, for he wants to take me far away from here, and I have determined to take my life rather than quit this country without seeing you again. This man is a scoundrel, and the sight of him is odious to me. You often told me that you loved me. If you were sincere when you said it, come I beg of you, come to the little iron gate at the end of the garden, below the slope and near the river, there where I spoke to you for the first time, as you went by on horseback. I am kept shut

up, but I can walk about my prison, and, unknown to him, I have kept a key to this little gate. I know not when or how I shall manage to send you this letter, for I am closely watched, but I write so as to be ready to profit by a chance which may perhaps never occur. Come as soon as you receive it, if you ever do receive it. One hour after sunset I go to this gate and listen, I always hope to hear the sound of your footsteps. I shall wait for you thus every evening until the middle of the month now begun. He has fixed our departure for then; but come what may he will depart alone. Come, I beg of you, before it be too late."

"What! is that all?" asked M. Jean.

"No, there is a postscript: 'From the window of the pavilion I have just heard two workmen say, as they passed along the road, that an officer in uniform had just arrived at the château. God be praised! You still live. A beggar is here now; I am going to throw him a piece of gold and my letter, and beg him to run to the château. If you have not forgotten me, come this night, for it is perhaps the last that I may yet be allowed to hope.'"

"The concluding lines are hastily written, and the ink is quite fresh," said the priest, leaning forward to examine the letter more closely; "still I don't understand anything more of it from that."

"I understand it," exclaimed Julien, whom this letter had thrown into a great state of agitation.

"At any rate, this singular message was not meant for you."

"No. It was meant for my cousin, Henri de Brannes."

"What makes you think so?"

"It speaks of the dangers he had undergone, and of not knowing whether he has survived the events of the war. The man in uniform, who had just arrived at the château, is myself, whom the workmen mistook for an officer. She thought it was Henri."

"She! who is she?"

"Ah! it's true! You do not know about it. Henri was much smitten by Monsieur Wassmann's daughter."

"What! could it be she—"

"Yes; she alone can have written that letter. She saw him on the evening before his departure for the army, and, since the battle of Sedan, has heard nothing more about him. 'Everything is hidden from me,' she says so. She is not aware that he is in Paris seriously wounded, and unable to come here, and she makes a last effort to see him again."

"But if that young girl wrote that, how do you explain the other letter, which was used to ram down the murderer's gun?"

"The murderer! What, do you doubt any longer but what it was that scoundrel, Wassmann?"

"I own the coincidence seems to prove it, and yet what contradictions still exist! The writing is the same, but not the composition. Read the torn letter again—it certainly is not that of a daughter to her father. To prove this, note merely the first line: 'Since I have left all to follow thee.'"

"And how can we be sure that this unhappy girl is Wassmann's daughter? I myself think that she is some poor creature whom he seduced somewhere, perhaps in Alsace—she spoke of Alsace, remember—and whom he has dragged about with him to further his abominable plans."

"But—what plans?"

"What! Don't you see that this man is a Prussian spy?"

"Impossible! He was in the Austrian service."

"That was a lie! Do not you remember the information obtained about

him from the Austrian embassy? They were unacquainted there with the so-called Major Wassmann. Ah! I now see clearly into all his infamy! Here! Read this sentence from the torn letter: 'To get rid of that keeper who may have seen thee formerly in Alsace'—the keeper, in question, was Michel Amstein, born at Colmar, where he had no doubt met this rascal Wassmann, at a time when the scamp did not conceal his real nationality. Wassmann killed him because he knew that he had been recognised and feared to be denounced. And in another place: 'If thou didst really love me thou wouldst not command me—this loyal young man—to attract him here to extort from him——.' I can now fill up the gaps burnt by the powder. The loyal young man is Henri, and what they wanted to extort from him was certain secret information about the war plans. He had been attached to the War Office, remember; and Wassmann relied on this woman's 'allowing him to believe that she was free'—see, it's written. He thought she could make the young stan-captain fall in love with her, and that through her he would learn everything."

"But this letter is subsequent to Michel's death, for at the time he was killed there was no question of a quarrel with Prussia."

"Prussia has never ceased sending spies here for years past; and besides it was especially after war was declared that this man showed especial attentions to Henri. You will, perhaps, tell me that, in these two letters, Wassmann's so-called daughter shows very different sentiments towards my cousin: that in the first she resists the idea of seeing him, and begs this Prussian to leave France with her; whilst in the second one she makes a great show of her passion for Henri, and proposes to leave Wassmann to follow him. Well, that proves that she has been quite smitten by a handsome young officer whom she often saw; for until Henri left for the camp at Châlons he never failed a single day to call at the Pavillon des Sorbiers; and, look here, speaking of the pavilion, if you have any further doubts, just read the end of the note: 'From the window of the pavilion,' she says, 'I have just heard two workmen say as they passed along,' and then, 'the little iron gate at the end of the garden, below the slope.' You know it well; it is the one communicating with the towing-path, and it is, doubtless, the one by which the murderer slipped out to go and lie in ambush for Michel in the Bélière woods, and by it he, moreover, returned home after he had killed the poor fellow."

"Yes," muttered M. Jean; "all that seems very probable, but there are so many strange points in the story—in fact, my head grows giddy in the midst of all these abominable complications. I can't believe in such a display of audacity; if this man were really a Prussian, how does he dare to remain here now, when his compatriots are within a march of Charly?"

"Don't you see that he remains here on purpose to guide them, to show them the best points for crossing the river? Don't you remember how constantly he made sketches on the banks of the Marne? You may be certain that those pretended landscapes were plans. And, now think over the sentence, 'until the middle of the month now begun.' That must have been written during the early days of September. 'He has fixed our departure for then.' Is it all clear to you now? He calculated that on or about the 15th the Prussians would be before Paris. That night, or the following night, he meant to join them with the three or four rogues, his servants, who are really nothing more than spies of a lower order."

"It seems to me," said the priest, "that you are rather venturesome as regards your conjectures; but even supposing they are correct, what is to be done?"

"You ask such a thing as that?" cried Julien. "Why, we must at once go and arrest Monsieur Wassmann and his servants and everyone else whom we find at the Pavillon des Sorbiers."

"Arrest them—by virtue of whose orders?"

"We are at war, the enemy will be here to-morrow; I can do without orders to seize a Prussian spy. If need were, the mayor would give me an authorization to requisition the gendarmes——"

"Hum! I don't advise you to go to the mayor. I know him. Vétillet is totally wanting in energy."

"Ah! well, I shall only have to beat up recruits as I go along. When it is known what Monsieur Wassmann has been doing here everyone in Charly will be ready to give me a helping hand."

"You surely don't think of such a thing, my dear boy"

"Why not?"

"What, you want to stir up a riot and send a horde of furious men to attack the pavilion—men quite beside themselves with passion, who will perhaps make the affair a pretext for robbery and arson? Believe me, these are not times to raise the fury of the masses."

"I know it; but I also know that this scoundrel will escape us if we don't make haste, and I want to catch him were it only to make him own that he killed poor Michel, and to secure the release of that unhappy poscher, the father of your dear pupil Marcel."

"I greatly doubt the efficacy of the means you propose, for violence injures the best of causes; but, whatever comes of it, I shall intercede with you on behalf of the poor woman, who, without intending it, it is true, has just sent us this valuable warning. If you carried out your plan, she would certainly be arrested, like the other inhabitants of the pavilion, and ill-treated perhaps; which would be a singular way, as you will agree, of rewarding her for the service she has rendered us. Besides, just think what your cousin Captain de Brannes will say when he has recovered. Will he be glad to learn that the woman he loved ——"

"You are right, your reverence," said Julien, warmly; "it is above all necessary to avoid compromising Henri. I will act alone."

"How?"

"I shall go this evening, one hour after sunset, to the little iron gate. I shall there find Wassmann's so called daughter. She will not fail to come there. I am in uniform. She will take me for my cousin; her messenger, as you know, was deceived about it. Well, I shall speak to her. I shall tell her who I am. I shall offer to take her under my protection if she will follow me. She will accept if only in the hopes of seeing Henri again. Then, as soon as she is in safety, I undertake to lay my hands on the traitor and murderer ——"

"What! this very night, and without anyone with you! You think of attacking this man in his own home, and among all his servants! It would be most imprudent, it would be risking your life rashly; and I entreat you to renounce this wild idea."

"I am expecting two friends who will accompany me, and the three of us together will be strong enough to manage Monsieur Wassmann and his valets. Moreover, I promise you that we will do nothing until we have got this unhappy woman out of his clutches, and then, if necessary, I shall fetch the sergeant of gendarmes. I know him, he has confidence in me and he will consent to help me by letting his men surround the pavilion."

"I persist in thinking, my dear boy, you would do better to leave it

alone," sighed M. Jean, who felt however that his entreaties would be of no avail.

"My resolution is taken," said Julien curtly; and I am going to take a walk in the direction of the pavilion to make sure that our Prussians have not yet decamped, and also to examine the approaches to the place. I shall return to receive my friends who are to arrive by the four o'clock train. I shall tell them all about the matter, and at sunset, we shall set out. They are stalwart and discreet fellows. You may be sure that everything will go well."

The priest was about to raise some fresh objections, but Julien placed the two letters in his hands, begging him to keep them until the morrow, and then he set off down the road leading to the Pavillon des Sorbiers. His abrupt departure curtailed all further remonstrance from M. Jean, who was greatly agitated and perplexed, not knowing whether he ought to run after his young friend or resign himself to awaiting the issue of the nocturnal enterprise. He at last decided on the latter course and then walked towards Ledoux's house where he thought he should find Mareel. It was his favorite recreation to chat with the little foundling, and he had never sought his company so frequently as during the last few weeks. The prattle and simple sallies of his pupil made him for a moment forget the misfortunes of his country and the wickedness of mankind.

Meanwhile M. de la Chanterie strode rapidly along the macadamized road, which crossed Charly from end to end, and speedily arrived in front of Monsieur Wassmann's residence. It was, as its name indicated, a charming pavilion built of brick, in the Louis XIII style, and surrounded by magnificent sorbs, covered with red berries. The front windows overlooked the road, and a yard—communicating with a walled garden planted with large trees—separated the main building from the stables.

Julien saw at a glance that the residents of this charming residence had not yet moved. M. Wassmann's coachman was in the middle of the yard, washing the landau, the wheels of which had so nearly crushed Marcel some months before. The valet, a huge fellow with whiskers even redder than his master's, was smoking a cigar on the threshold of the stable. There was nothing to indicate any preparations for departure.

Julien passed by without stopping. He did not wish to be recognised, and he hardly dared raise his eyes to the windows. At the central one, however, he espied a seated woman, and realised that it was from there the letter had been thrown. The writer was still at the same place, motionless and dreamy, perhaps hoping she was about to be seen by Henri de Brannes, hastening to warn her by a concerted signal, that he would be at the place of assignation that evening. However, Julien lowered his head and hurried past.

Before him the road stretched away in the distance, dusty and deserted till lost to sight. To his right there was a turfy slope which led to the towing-path. He darted down it and followed the garden wall, which on this side did not appear to have any opening. Having made two-thirds of the descent, he reached the corner of the wall, turned round, and then, facing the river, he recognised the little iron gate mentioned in the letter. It was high, narrow, and strong. The lock seemed such as to resist all attempt at forcing.

"Happily, she has the key," thought Julien.

He completed his exploration by examining the wall parallel to the one that he had approached by, ascertained that there was no place of egress on that side and reached the château by crossing the strip of meadow land and the Bélière woods. This was the very route that the murderer must have taken.

Fabregue and Du Tremblay, who had just arrived by train, were waiting for

him on the steps of the château, and he quickly told them what had happened. The worthy fellows, who were not acquainted with M. Wassmann's story, showed some surprise in listening to Julien's abridged account of his various misdeeds, but when they knew the individual in question was certainly a Prussian spy they asked no more. They were as patriotic as La Chanterie, and the ex-quartermaster especially hated the soldiers of King William. He would at first hear of nothing less than taking the pavilion by assault and shooting M. Wassmann and the whole band; but Julien reminded him that before settling accounts with the ruffian it was necessary to save the poor woman. However, he had great trouble to appease his friend. They nevertheless sat down to dinner and did full justice to three partridges and a pheasant, cooked by the young keeper Bernard, and shot in the Count de Braunes's woods by the old keeper, La Bretèche, who wished to leave as little game as possible for the Prussian officers when they arrived. The dinner over, they armed themselves. The two francs-tireurs had not brought their Remingtons, and Julien's chassepot was still at the depot of his battalion. The keepers, however, lent them three sporting guns of heavy calibre, which they loaded with ball, and night having now set in they started off.

La Chanterie, who knew the ground, undertook to direct the expedition, and proceeded along the towing-path, which was an easier approach than the wood. A quarter of an hour after leaving the château, the three friends reached the wall of Wassmann's garden, and stopped to concert together before going into action. The night was a clear one, and the sky full of stars. This mournful month of September, 1870, was a splendid one: you would have said that Nature derided the disasters of France. Standing on the towing-path the three friends were merely separated from the garden wall by a green bank, and they could plainly see the little gate some sixty paces above the path, and slightly to their right hand. Julien thought that the right moment had come for him to separate from his comrades. The sight of three armed men would certainly have terrified the unhappy Catherine, and, had she espied the party approaching the gate, she would certainly have fled into the pavilion. In order not to terrify her, it was necessary for Julien to approach alone, and with infinite precautions. Accordingly, it was settled that, instead of climbing straight up the grassy bank, they should diverge to the left, so as to reach the corner of the wall where Fabrègue and Du Tremblay were to remain as sentinels, ready to join La Chanterie at the first summons. In the meantime he was to glide past the wall till he reached the little gate.

The chance of being surprised by Wassmann and his men was thus duly provided against, and the scoundrels were to be fired at, at once, if they refused to surrender. Fabrègue longed for a tussle, and even Du Tremblay would have been equally glad to test his gun on a Prussian spy. Julien, on the contrary, preferred a peaceful issue to the expedition, for a nocturnal skirmish could not clear up the mystery attaching to the Pavillon des Sorbiers, and it might jeopardise the life of the young woman whom he wished to save. He therefore begged his comrades to show the greatest prudence; and then, having settled their plan of action they again went forward, and reached the corner of the wall without further incident.

The two francs-tireurs here took up their positions, while La Chanterie walked gently towards the gate. As he stealthily approached he wondered how he should prevent Catherine from running off as soon as she saw him. He hoped that in the darkness she would take him for his cousin, and the uniform and kepi would certainly help to mislead her; but he was not at all sure on the point, for women in love are wonderfully acute in recognizing the

object of their affections. Accordingly, as soon as he saw her he meant to call out, "Henri de Brannes sends me to you," and then to hasten forward and explain to her why he had come instead of his cousin; finally, he intended to urge her to open the gate and follow him. Recalling the terms of her letter, which expressed such an ardent desire to escape, he did not doubt about her consenting to leave with him. He took care to carry his gun under his arm, so that the sight of firearms, which officers do not usually carry, might not spoil his chance as to recognition; and as it was highly probable that he would be the first on the spot, he intended to hide himself near the gate and wait.

He was not further than ten paces from the gate, however, when he heard some one talking behind the wall. He stopped short and listened attentively. Two voices were raised alternately: one was that of a woman—undoubtedly Catherine—and the other that of a man he seemed to know. Julien proceeded a little further, and the words now fell more distinctly on his ear.

Whoever the people were, they were talking in German, and with great animation. Was it Wassmann who was taking the bass part in this duet? Julien thought so, without being quite certain, never having heard this pseudo-Austrian in anything but French. It is a well-known fact that nothing so misleads the ear as a change of idiom. In this uncertainty ought Julien to show himself? He thought not. It was quite possible that the conversation was going on between the girl and one of the servants. In that case it was best to let them come to an explanation before he showed himself. He, therefore, did not stir.

At length the talking reached a higher key, but without La Chanterie being able to catch the full drift of the phrases, although he was well acquainted with German. However, the odd words he did catch here and there at length enlightened him as to the nature of the dialogue. The man was imperiously commanding, and the woman was refusing to obey. There was no longer any doubt; it was Wassmann; he alone had the right to give any orders to Catherine. Everything indicated, moreover, that he had surprised her waiting at the little gate, had reproached her with coming there, and was now trying to get her away.

Julien hesitated no longer, but rushed forward. There came a sudden shriek, as that of a woman violently assaulted,

"Help me, Henri! come to my help!" cried a voice in French—a voice which was as speedily stifled.

"You can call him if you like, he won't come, he is dead," replied Wassmann, in the same language.

Julien reached the gate at a bound. Through the bars, and but two paces from him, he saw a white form, above which there towered a black shadow. It was poor Catherine on her knees, whilst Wassmann twisted her arms to oblige her to follow him.

Julien raised his gun to aim at the ruffian, but he was too near the gate for the purpose, and he had to draw back so as to place himself in a more favourable position. The movement revealed his presence. Wassmann struck the woman in the chest with great violence, and then sprang quickly aside. Before La Chanterie could cover him with his gun, he had disappeared behind a thick clump of bushes, and hurried off as fast as he could.

"He has killed me," muttered Catherine; who had just fallen close to the gate.

Julien was about to fire in the direction which the murderer had taken, but the dying woman's sigh made him lower his gun.

"Help ! friends," he cried, and he threw himself with all his weight against the gate, to try and open it.

The victim lay before him, stretched on the grass, merely separated from him by the iron bars, which he shook furiously, but which resisted all his efforts. "The key—I have the key," said Catherine in a weak voice, almost a whisper. And she raised her arm, to give Julien the key which she had just drawn from her waistband. But her arm fell powerless to her side again, and the key rolled on the gravel walk.

Julien knelt down and tried to obtain it by passing his hand under the gate, but it was beyond his reach, and his fingers only touched poor Catherine's quivering form. He then hastily drew back his hand and gave a cry of horror—it was covered in blood.

"I am going to die—he has stabbed me to the heart. Henri—do you know Henri—the officer—over there at the château—tell him that I loved him—that my last thoughts were of him——"

It was all over. The voice died away. Catherine was dead.

The two francs-tireurs arrived just as she was expiring. "What the deuce has happened ?" began Fabrègue.

"He has just murdered her," cried Julien, stooping to pick up his gun.

"Who ?"

"Wassmann—the Prussian—let us run—we will kill him like a mad dog." And turning round the corner of the wall, parallel to the one where he had left his confederates, he rushed up the slope as fast as he could, so as to reach the high road and the front entrance of the pavilion. Fabrègue and Du Tremblay had only understood one thing of all that had occurred, viz., that the Prussian had escaped, that they must cut off his retreat, and to beard him in his den. They ran as fast as Julien.

The bank was very steep, and at times very slippery. It took them some minutes to climb it, and they were just on the point of reaching the summit, when the noise of a horse galloping, echoed along the road.

"It is he !—he is making off !" cried Julien.

And, with a last effort, he reached the roadway. The horse, tearing on at full speed, had just passed by, and Wassmann was indeed its rider, for the east wind suddenly bore to Julien the mocking words, "Till we meet again, Monsieur de la Chanterie. Remember me kindly to your friend Robert."

Julien at once discharged both of his barrels of his gun, but the horseman was already too far off, and the bullets were lost in the darkness. The noise of the gallop subsisted for some little time, and finally died away.

"The scoundrel escapes us," furiously cried Fabrègue, who had just reached Julien.

"Let us search his house, we shall perhaps find the rest of the band there," suggested Du Tremblay.

"And we will succour his victim, if there is yet time" added Julien, wheeling round and darting towards the pavilion.

They found the large gate wide open, and the yard deserted. The landau was still there, but the servants had made off with the horses. Not a single light was burning at the windows of the house. Wassmann had evidently sent his servants away at nightfall. During his morning ride he had consulted with the German outposts, and, when surprised by Julien, had come back to fetch Catherine. The three friends ran across the garden and reached the little gate. The dead woman was lying in a pool of blood. Wassmann's dagger must have pierced her to the heart.

"Poor girl !" murmured Julien, "it was I who killed her."

XI.

THE day which followed upon these dramatic events is one still well recollected by the inhabitants of Charly-sous-Bois. They learnt, on awaking, that the vanguard of the German army had occupied the heights of Cœuilly, opposite their village, and that M. Wassmann, the rich and generous tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers, the so-called friend of France, had gone to join the Prussians, after stabbing his daughter.

To tell the truth, the former news astonished them a great deal less than the latter did; for several days past self-deceit as to the enemy's progress had become impossible; however, the flight of the Teutons of the pavilion thoroughly stupified the townsfolk. Wassmann had latterly quite won their sympathy, and they were reluctant to believe that this gracious grandee was neither more nor less than a spy and a murderer. They were obliged, however, to submit to evidence, when they learned that the corpse of Mademoiselle Catherine had been removed by direction of the mayor, and that nobody had been found in the house, on its being searched from top to bottom by francs-tireurs and gendarmes. M. Wassmann had merely left his furniture and carriages behind him hoping perhaps to recover them as soon as his friends, the Germans, occupied Charly. He had carefully carried off his papers, plans, and firearms, plain proof that he had long since intended to abscond; in fact, he had no doubt removed all things of value little by little, on the occasions of his daily rides and drives.

As a matter of course his treachery and crime gave rise to a deal of comment; and Digonnard the chemist quite distinguished himself on this occasion. He, who had so recently glorified the liberality which the tenant of the pavilion displayed, suddenly remembered that some three months before he had met him in Paris, wearing a footman's livery, and that a little later on he had reported this fact to the investigating magistrate, who had refused to listen to him. From all this he drew the conclusion that the magistrate had been bought by the Prussians, and the general staff as well, for everyone was aware that before Captain de Brannes had been wounded at Sedan he had been a frequent visitor at Wassmann's. In reference to this question the chemist even made a very fine speech at the club, at which his faithful friend Vétillet presided, and declared that it was preferable that well-selected corporals should be appointed to the command of the various regiments. This was almost as fine a speech as one which he made a little later on advocating a torrential sortie. Several citizens of Charly allowed themselves to be influenced by the chemist's eloquence, and but little more was needed to bring about an attack on the château and the parsonage, for the priest also was accused of having had friendly relations with the spy.

Fortunately the presence of Julien and his two friends moderated the ardour of these fiery patriots; the trio reinforcing M. de Brannes's keepers, there were five determined protectors for the château and M. Jean; and no one cared to interfere with them. Moreover, whatever the young lady of the pavilion had been, all the inhabitants of the place deeply regretted her. She had done nothing but good in the village, and all manner of stories were concocted as to her origin and the cause of her death. In point of fact the various narratives were only so many conjectures, for no clue was obtained as to the mysterious points of the story, and Catherine's real identity remained unknown.

M. de la Chanterie and the priest kept to themselves what they knew, so that nobody, not even cunning Digonnard, suspected the real facts of the drama

enacted that summer night. Curiously enough, moreover, not one of the natives of the place had any idea of connecting the murder of Wassmann's asserted daughter with that of Michel the keeper. The crime in the Bélière woods had already been forgotten by the folks of Charly, just like the strange and fatal illness of Mademoiselle Rose.

Julien, however, was always thinking of these bygone matters and so was M. Jean. After that terrible night La Chanterie had hastened to the curé's house and acquainted him with all the strange and mournful events that had just occurred. But the priest was preparing for mass, and it was only at a late hour of the morning that he had leisure to discuss the change in the situation as regarded the prisoner at Mazas. Fabrègue and Du Tremblay had taken the train back to Paris, but not without promising their friend that they would return some day to explore the banks of the Marne. Indeed, Fabrègue took a solemn oath, that he would bring down the odious Wassmann, who could hardly have left the neighbourhood as he could be so useful to the German army in these parts.

La Chanterie on his side, also, wished to return to Paris as soon as possible, in view of giving his uncle full information as to what had occurred at Charly; he meant to tell the news to his uncle alone, for Henri was not in a fit state to hear that Catherine was dead; and as for Gabrielle, it was preferable to spare her all emotion until the time came for announcing that the poacher Robert had been set at liberty.

Just before noon, when M. Jean, returned from church with Marcel, who had been attending divine mass, he found Julien impatiently awaiting him in the parsonage garden. They sat down under a green arbour; Julien and M. Jean bent upon serious conversation, Marcel intent upon reading the story of Robinson Crusoe, which the priest had lent him as he had learnt his lessons properly.

"Providence would not permit a terrible judicial error," said the nephew of the Count de Brannes. "I shall see the investigating magistrate this evening, and I hope I shall forthwith obtain an order for Robert's discharge."

"I fear that you are mistaken on this point," murmured M. Jean.

"What! after hearing what happened at the pavilion you still think that there is no evidence as to Wassmann's rascality?"

"His rascality, yes, no doubt; but the share he is supposed to have had in the keeper's murder is another matter. It is now established that this scoundrel was a spy, and that he killed a poor creature whom we took for his daughter. But it is not proved that he killed Michel."

"Is it necessary to remind you of the letter written by his victim, the letter which he used as a gun-wad."

"That is a presumption but not a proof. It remains to be explained how he could have been at the Café du Grand-Vainqueur and in the Bélière woods at one and the same time."

"It is quite evident that Mademoiselle Rose was his accomplice, and that remorse at having perjured herself urged her to commit suicide."

"It is clear to you, perhaps, and to me also; but the magistrate cannot content himself with mere probabilities, and the *alibi* is still all powerful."

"I shall destroy that pretended *alibi*. I shall prove that Wassmann was able to leave the pavilion and return by the little garden gate."

"The shot which killed Michel was fired just at nine o'clock. I heard it and gave evidence to that effect. Now this man was at the café a few minutes before nine. Mademoiselle Rose declared so on oath."

"She lied, as I told you when I left the magistrate's chambers. You

remember her embarrassed manner, her strange behaviour, her change of expression ?”

“Perfectly. But that is a mere matter of personal recollection, and is not recorded in the judicial report, whereas the statements of this unhappy woman were duly taken down, and corroborated by four inhabitants of Charly, who unanimously and unhesitatingly declared that Wassmann had been at the Café du Grand-Vainqueur at nine o’clock.”

“Fine authority ! that of Dignonard, Vétillet, and the rest of them !”

“I grant that they are people of no great respectability ; but their evidence will still carry weight, for it is based on fact. Besides, to tell you the truth, I have serious reasons for doubting Robert’s innocence, for the keeper’s last words are graven deeply on my memory ; the final word he wanted to say began with a ‘p,’ I’m sure. Whom could he have meant if not ‘the poacher.’”

“Perhaps so ; or, meaning Robert, he might have said the Parisian. That was the prisoner’s *alias* about here.”

“It’s all the same ; the jury will naturally think that Michel meant to say ‘the poacher,’ or ‘the Parisian,’ and lacked time and strength to do so.”

“Really, your reverence, you are most discouraging. Must an innocent man be condemned, when the guilt of that abominable German is evident to all unprejudiced eyes ?”

“No,” said M. Jean warmly, “I won’t give up all hopes of clearing Robert, and I am tempted, like you, to believe that Monsieur Wassmann’s *alibi* is founded on some fraud. But how can we possibly prove that ?”

“Yes, where can we find a truthful witness ? No one was there excepting that woman who paid for the lie by her life, and the four stupid bigwigs of Charly.”

“Ah !” exclaimed the priest, seized with a sudden inspiration ; “why didn’t I think of it before ? Marcel was there.” And turning to the child, who was absorbed in his book, he asked, “Do you know, my lad, what poor Mademoiselle Rose died of ?”

“Oh, yes !” replied Marcel, closing his book, and raising his wondering eyes, “Oh, yes ! I know, it was the clock that killed her !”

“The clock !” exclaimed M. Jean ; “come, Marcel, think of what you are saying ! Don’t be childish, but reply sensibly.”

“But, your reverence, I assure you that it was the clock that made her ill,” murmured the lad.

“This is most peculiar,” said Julien. “Do you remember that the wretched woman talked about the clock while she was dying.”

“Explain yourself, my friend,” said the priest to Marcel ; “how do you know that it was the clock that made her ill ?”

“Because Mama Ledoux took me every evening to Mademoiselle Rose’s, while she was ill,” replied Marcel ; “and I saw she was always taken with it at the same hour.”

“Taken with what ? Ah ! her fever ? Yes, no doubt, as it was intermittent and returned periodically. But what connection —”

“Pray let me question him,” interrupted Julien. “Tell me, little chap, what happened of an evening, when you were alone with her ?”

“Oh ! sir, it was very sad, and I felt very sorry to see her like that. At first she laughed—and seemed pleased to see me—and said to me, ‘Marcel place the stools round the corner table. The gentlemen will be here presently.’ Then I arranged the stools, and she fetched the dominoes. And then she went to the door, to see if anyone was coming—but she saw no one, and came back ;

and I heard her say in a low voice, 'they are all deserting me. I am ruined.'"

"She was alluding to her customers," whispered M. Jean, "since Monsieur Vétillet has become major, and Monsieur Digonnard has taken up politics so madly; they have neglected their favourite amusement, and it is not surprising that the poor old maid——"

"But the clock; what about the clock?" resumed Julien.

"Well, sir, when she had sat down at her counter, she made me sit beside her, and began to tell me beautiful stories to amuse me; but while I listened, I noticed that she kept staring at the clock; I looked too, and as the short hand approached nine, and the long hand twelve, Mademoiselle Rose grew quite pale and forgot where she was in the story; she ended by coming to a dead stop at last and shut her eyes—you would have thought she was asleep."

"It's incomprehensible!" muttered the priest.

"Not to me," said Julien excitedly. "Go on, Marcel; what did she do afterwards?"

"Afterwards? Why she got up quite suddenly, and said to me 'Boy, open the clock case and stop the pendulum. The noise makes my head ache.' It amused me to touch the works, so I climbed up on a stool, opened the case, and held the large piece of lead, at the end of a long wire, so that it couldn't tick any more."

"And then she seemed relieved?"

"Oh! yes; for she began the story again and went on to the end."

"And the clock remained stopped?"

"Not all the time. When ten o'clock struck at the church, Mademoiselle Rose left the counter, opened the glass front of the dial, and moved the hands; then she opened the case and made the pendulum swing again, and when Mama Ledoux came to fetch me, Mademoiselle Rose used to say to her, 'I have had my attack, but I'm better now.'"

"A curious attack which depended on the swinging of a pendulum," whispered Julien in the priest's ear.

"And which came on regularly at nine o'clock," murmured M. Jean; "it was at nine o'clock Michel was——"

"It was not fever, but intermittent remorse. Now my little fellow, tell me, you did not see Mademoiselle Rose the day she died?"

"Excuse me, sir. Mama Ledoux took me to the café sooner than usual, as she was going to carry some vegetables to Joinville-le-Pont, and did not wish to leave me alone in the house. Monsieur Ledoux hadn't returned from Paris, and——"

"Did anyone come to the café whilst you were there?"

"Yes, sir. The tall gentleman from the Pavillon des Sorhiers."

"Wassmann! Ah! I divined it," exclaimed Julien; "now we shall have a proof. What did the gentleman do, child?"

"He came in a dog-cart, and stopped in front of the door, got out, and told me to hold his horse, then he went in, and talked with Mademoiselle Rose"

"What did they talk about?"

"I don't know, I didn't listen. Only I saw her serve him with some beer."

"And she drank some too, I suppose?"

"Yes; he took the bottle, poured out three tumblers, and sent Mademoiselle Rose with one to me, but I wouldn't drink it, for I don't like beer, it's too bitter."

"Happily," muttered M. Jean, "God Himself protected the poor child."

"And whilst the landlady came to the door did the gentleman remain

alone at the counter, where the two other glasses were standing?" asked La Chanterie, following up his idea.

"Yes, sir."

"And when she went back they chinked glasses and she drank with him?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear what was said as he left?"

"I heard the gentleman say, 'Be easy, I am looking after you; what I promised you shall be done this week, and you shall leave the country.' Then he got into his carriage, as he had business near Apilly, and drove off at full trot."

"I remember very well seeing him pass along the road," said the priest.

"Yes; he was making off after committing the crime; that is his usual dodge; it had served him well already once before," replied Julien, ironically.

"What happened after his departure?" he added, turning to Marcel.

"Mama Ledoux passed by with her donkey just as the gentleman had gone off; she came in, and then Mademoiselle Rose gave a shriek. She threw up her arms and fell all of a heap on the floor."

"And Jacqueline sent you off to fetch the priest?"

"Yes; as Mademoiselle Rose came to, she said, 'A priest; I want to confess myself.' So I ran to the parsonage, and on to the château. And Mademoiselle Rose's face had so terrified me that I tore off so soon as I had spoken to the count's servant, and hid myself behind Mama Ledoux's house."

"Well, your reverence, do you now doubt that this man poisoned the unhappy woman who died before our eyes?" asked Julien.

"No," replied M. Jean; "and if we had been aware of his visit to the café we might perhaps have prevented another crime—the one he committed last night."

"Madame Ledoux knew very well that I had seen the gentleman from the pavilion," said Marcel, softly.

"And, according to the custom of country folks, she took care to say nothing about it."

"You no longer doubt, I hope, but what the deceased was Wassmann's accomplice?" resumed Julien. "This remorse, returning as it did always at the same hour, is very significant. She had lied, like all the rogues who were at her place on the night of Michel's murder; she lied in affirming that the murderer was in the café at the very moment when he was committing his crime in the Bélière woods."

"That now seems very probable to me, but I am quite puzzled as to all these contradictions."

"We know enough to go and ask the magistrate for Robert's discharge."

M. Jean shook his head, and did not seem particularly convinced. "Something more is wanted" he murmured, "we still possess nothing but conjectures, not one proof positive, and as long as we cannot establish what infernal trick this man played to prove his *alibi*—"

"Marcel!" cried Julien, struck with a sudden inspiration; "do you remember what happened at the café, on the evening you arrived at Charly?"

"Yes sir; Mama Ledoux took me to Mademoiselle Rose's. It was growing dark, and when we went in Mademoiselle Rose was standing on a high stool and we gave her a great fright."

"On a stool! near the clock, eh?"

"Yes, and she got down at once, as she had finished setting the hands."

"The hands ! she was touching the hands ?"

"Yes, sir. Mama Ledoux paid no attention to it, but I heard the click of the glass case, as Mademoiselle Rose shut it too."

"And she was putting the hands back, eh ? my hoy ?"

"I don't know, sir, because she hid the clock from me. But afterwards, when Mama Ledoux came back crying that her cousin had been killed, all the gentlemen who were playing dominoes, ran out into the street—and Mam'zelle Rose suddenly fell quite ill. So Mama Ledoux threw some water in her face and that made her come to. Then Mama Ledoux went outside too, and I remained alone with Mam'zelle Rose, who sprang up on the stool and moved the hands. She turned the long one more than half way round the face of the clock——"

"At last !" exclaimed Julien, "now we know what the *alibi* was founded upon. Rose put the hands on to the right time, after previously putting them back."

"And when she had done," continued Marcel, "she whispered to me, 'My little fellow, you mustn't tell anyone that I gave the hands a push with my thumb ; and if you keep quiet, I'll give you a cake every day.'"

"Embrace me, my dear child," said M. Jean, who was weeping for joy, "you have just saved your father's life !"

XII.

Six weeks had elapsed. It was now nearly the end of October, and each day the iron circle round Paris grew closer and closer. Beyond the Marne you were in Prussia. Charly-sous-Bois was situated at the extreme boundary of the Parisian territory, on the eastern side, and it was only held by outposts. The cannon of the fort of Nogent protected it sufficiently to prevent the Germans from settling there, but they could not prevent the incursions of the enemy's patrols who prowled about the neighbourhood every night.

And so the pleasant village was almost deserted. The Mayor, M. Vétillet, had long ago placed himself in security behind the fortifications of the capital. Digounard had closed his shop, and only appeared at Charly at long intervals to display the *kepi* with which he had adorned his head since the outset of the siege. Cruchot and Verduron presided over a suburban refugees' club at Bercy. Old Ledoux and his wife Jacqueline, by virtue of the law on absentees, occupied some fine rooms on the Boulevard Haussmann, where they had installed themselves together with certain domestic pets. In the village there only remained about a hundred obstinate people, who were more plucky than their fellow citizens, or more attached to their belongings ; together with M. de Brannes's two keepers, the priest and his old servant.

M. Jean had experienced great delight during the preceding month. Robert had been set at liberty. The charges brought against him would not hold out, after the suspicious conduct of M. Wassmann, his precipitate flight, the murder of Catherine, and above all, the clear and precise evidence given by little Marcel.

The investigating magistrate had questioned the child several times, and he was convinced that he had told the truth on all points. Rose must have been poisoned by the Prussian. The latter, having heard of the remorse which tortured her, had murdered her to prevent her from confessing the thumb stroke, by which his *alibi* had been established.

The anonymous letter, received by Jacqueline on the morning of the murder, was compared with the missive which had served as a gun wad, and

with that which had been intended for Henri de Brannes. There was no possible doubt as to the identity of the three handwritings, so that the guilt of the tenant of the pavilion was plainly established. On the other hand, it became certain that M. Wassmann had merely stayed in Paris and at Charly to play the spy, and that he was indebted for his apparent opulence to funds secretly supplied him by the Prussian Legation. His position as a diplomatic and military spy being fully established, his conduct was perfectly logical, and his crimes fitted naturally one into the other.

He had killed Michel Amstein, because Amstein, an Alsatian, had formerly met him at Colmar, where he was already playing his usual game, probably under another name; and because he feared that the gamekeeper would recognise him and denounce him as a Prussian spy. He had killed Rose because Rose had been his accomplice in this murder, and Rose might be tempted to talk. He had killed Catherine, because Catherine also possessed his secret, and especially because she had refused to second his ignoble projects, and to follow him to the head-quarters of the German army.

Julien, in the course of numerous interviews with the magistrate, succeeded in piecing together the story of the first crime, including all the details of its preparation and execution. Wassmann, having determined to murder Michel, had only awaited a favourable occasion for doing so with impunity. For several days past the landlady of the Grand Vainqueur, apparently located at Charly by Wassmann himself, and obliged to obey him by reason of some old complicity which made her his dependent, the landlady, we say, had received secret orders to put the hands of the clock back every evening, at a time when the keeper was on his usual round in the Bélière woods. Marcel's accident furnished the desired opportunity. Wassmann, on the Place de la Bastille, had at once planned the scheme of giving Jacqueline Ledoux an appointment at the café kept by Mademoiselle Rose, so that he might show himself there in presence of the bigwigs of the place, on the very natural pretext of inquiring after the child who had been knocked down by his horses. Everything thus being afore-planned, he must have gone off, duly disguised and armed, by the little garden gate, at about half-past eight o'clock, have reached M. de Brannes's wood as rapidly as possible, and have hidden himself there close to the path which the keeper usually followed on his rounds.

Michel having been shot dead at nine o'clock precisely, Wassmann must have rushed off as quickly as possible, have returned by the same road to the Pavillon des Sorbiers, have hastily divested himself of the blouse and pantaloons, which he had put on over his other clothes, and then have walked quickly along the village high street towards the Grand-Vainqueur, which he had really reached at about half-past nine, although the clock, thanks to Mademoiselle Rose's skilful thumb-stroke, pointed to 8.50. Thus was explained an *alibi* which had almost sent an innocent man to the guillotine.

As to the warning sent to Madame Ledoux by that wretched girl Catherine, it was easily explained. Wassmann's pretended daughter knew Jacqueline, who often brought flowers to the pavilion; she had often chatted with her, and might easily have heard her say that Michel was her cousin. Decided on trying to prevent a crime which she clearly foresaw, and being reluctant to denounce Wassmann, to whom fate had bound her, she had thought of warning the gardener's wife by an anonymous letter, being, no doubt, unaware of the fact that this woman could not read. Fate had intervened. The letter had been read too late; Robert had gone poaching in the Bélière woods at the exact time when Wassmann was lying in wait for Michel. The rest is known.

As for Julien's personal adventures with the Prussian, the young fellow

could not arrive at a positive certainty. Still, he remained perfectly convinced that it was Wassmann whom he had hunted through the wood, and whom he had found on the banks of the Marne, pretending to paint a landscape. He also persisted in thinking that this spy, of whom he had made such an enemy, by undertaking Robert's defence, had tried to rob him of the compromising letter—once by burglary, and on another occasion by violence on the boulevard; that this same rascal had tried to drown him in the Seine in front of the island of Croissy, and that the noble Saint-Avertin was an agent he had subsidized to give him a sword thrust. Saint-Avertin, by the way, had scrambled away like a hare a few days before the investment of Paris, and it was highly probable that he was now ruralizing in one of the departments occupied by the German forces.

The investigating magistrate had admitted all these facts, the first as proven, the others as probable; and, in consequence, he had given orders for Robert to be set at liberty. At any other time the poacher, discharged as to the murder, would probably have been kept in prison for vagrancy, poaching, and so forth. But Paris was now in a state of siege, and the working magistrate was of opinion that, instead of keeping a strong, bold fellow under lock and key, it would be better to grant him liberty to go and fight for his country.

Robert wished nothing better, and for many reasons. First of all his temperament urged him to fighting, and he had a particular grudge against the Germans; however, during his protracted detention at Mazas, a very great change had come over him.

On learning from M. Jean the touching story of Eugénie's devotion for a rival's child, now so miraculously discovered; on seeing the written proof of Marcel's parentage, the poacher had begun to look more kindly on his wife and offspring. He had, indeed, begged his wife's pardon for all the undeserved suffering she had experienced, and he seemed disposed to make her as happy as he could, to live for her and her children, including the little foundling whom she had as generously welcomed as if he had come of her own blood; for since the Ledoux's departure from Charly, Marcel had lived at Antoine Cormier's house, with his half brothers, and Eugénie had treated him, as if he were her own son. However, at the same time as Robert evinced sincere repentance for the past and a warm attachment for his family, he expressed a firm wish to atone for his past misconduct by future acts. On leaving prison, he had barely taken time to embrace his wife and children, before enlisting in a small corps of *francs-tireurs*, not those who paraded through Paris in fanciful costumes and plumed hats; for the comrades he chose were all men determined on bold and resolute fighting, such as was likely to endanger their lives.

M. de la Chanterie, whom he went to thank on the same day as he received his discharge, tried to persuade him to enlist in a marching battalion of the National Guard where, with his former experience as a non-commissioned officer, he might have been very useful; but nothing would make him do so. Robert meant to see the enemy as often as possible, and at close quarters. So, on the third day after his discharge, he was already at the outposts on the Marne. Eugénie wept bitterly, but resigned herself, for she realised that her husband needed to reinstate himself in public opinion, and then she hoped that he again loved her, and that Providence would protect him.

Happiness had now returned to the Rue de Charonne. The Cormiers, saved from the usurers' clutches, paid their debt of gratitude to the good priest of Charly by overwhelming those in whom he was interested with loving care. The prospect was brighter also at the Count de Brannes's mansion on the Quai d'Orsay. Henri was now convalescent and anxious to resume active

service. Gabrielle had confessed to her father how much she loved Julien, and had obtained his consent to their future marriage. But before the wedding could take place the war must come to an end, and when and how would it finish? This was the question that three of the principal personages of our story were debating one fine evening towards the end of October, as they were assembled together in the belfry of Charly church.

Julien de la Chanterie was now serving in the 7th battalion of the Mobile Guard, encamped in the Bois de Boulogne, and it was only at long intervals that he asked for a short leave to go and see his uncle, Henri and Gabrielle. On this particular occasion, however, he had set out early in the morning, and after breakfasting with M. de Brannes he had taken the Vincennes railway-line, and put in a sudden appearance at Charly parsonage, where M. Jean received him with open arms. His surprise was considerable when he found the poacher there. Robert and the small party of francs-tireurs he belonged to had been picketed for the last week along the bank of the Marne, between Créteil and Charly, and the ex-poacher, taking it into his head to pay the priest a visit, had left his comrades before Champigny, and crossed the woods, his carbine on his shoulder and his hunting-knife in his belt.

The reception was gay and cordial on both sides. Julien knew that Robert was atoning for his past by behaving like a honest man, and he showed no fuss in treating him as a brother in arms. M. Jean, on his side, entertained the warmest friendship, and even a little admiration for Julien, while he showed great sympathy for Marcel's father, founded on an appreciation of his return to better conduct.

Robert had sworn unbounded gratitude and attachment for his protectors so the meeting was quite a little fête at the parsonage. Handshakes were exchanged; the trio talked a little of the past, and a great deal of the present, drinking to the defeat of the Germans with a bottle of old brandy, which the priest had held in reserve for some grand occasion.

Julien and Robert meant to return to their posts in the evening, and before the hour for parting came, M. Jean wished to show them the Prussian lines, at no great distance from the village. They were to be seen extremely clearly from the church steeple, where the military engineers had placed a telescope and signal apparatus.

For the moment there was no one on duty in this observatory, and the priest, who had a key of the belfry stairs, could easily conduct his friends to see the curious gloomy picture now presented by the neighbourhood of Charly, formerly so fresh, so charming and coquettish. Behind them stretched the woods of Vincennes, where the leaves already yellow, were falling amid the cold autumn winds; at their feet flowed the Marne, silent and deserted, the Marne whose echoes had erst repeated the joyous songs of boating parties; while further off stretched the plain of Villiers, grey and barren; and, further still, uprose the woody slopes of Cœuilly. Nothing was stirring on this sad landscape. Only here and there tiny coils of smoke ascended from behind some bushes or felled trees, marking a German bivouac. The enemy was there.

Sometimes a little white cloud emerged from the fringe of trees along the river side, and the wind wafted the ping of a rifle bullet fired by some hidden sharpshooter on the bank.

La Chanterie having scoured the desolate horizon with his eyes, suddenly glanced at the Pavillon des Sorbiers. He again beheld the garden and the little gate which poor Catherine had fallen and he thought of M. Wassmann's unhappy victim.

"Poor woman!" said M. Jean to him who had guessed his thoughts. "To end thus! Shall we ever know her real name and the ties which bound her to that monster?"

"I greatly fear we never shall, any more than we shall ever learn the exact name of his other victim, that woman Rose. I should really like to find the scoundrel to send a bullet after him."

"If your battalion comes here," said the priest, "you may possibly see him, for he has not left the neighbourhood, and I have seen him distinctly several times."

"You have seen him?" exclaimed Julien, completely astounded.

"As clear as I see you. I don't know what office he fills, something half civil and half military, at the head-quarters of the German army, now before us, but he rides along the river bank, opposite his old home. With this telescope I can recognise him perfectly whenever he shows himself."

"Is it possible! You really make me long to ask for four day's leave to station myself on the bank, and fire at him when he appears."

"Oh! he takes great precautions; still I am convinced that he often crosses the Marne at nightfall, and prowls about the pavilion and the village."

"Then it would be easy to watch him, and——"

"Your reverence," now said Robert, who had been looking through the telescope, "there is a man on horseback coming yonder, behind the fringe of poplars—ah! now I see him clearly—he is stopping by the water-side and looking in this direction with a glass. Ah! he has put it back in his pocket—and he shows his hideous face. But a thousand thunderbolts!" added the poacher, suddenly—"it is Tichdorf!"

"Tichdorf!" said the vicar and Julien together; "who is Tichdorf?"

"The scoundrel who denounced me to the police, after having pretended to conspire with me—the rascal who wrote anonymous letters to me about my wife"

"Ah! I remember!" muttered M. Jean; "you told me about him when you were in prison! He had been your partner and ruined you."

"And he was a Prussian. That's it," said Robert; "but, dash it, I never thought I should meet him here prancing about on a fine horse. I thought he had been hanged in his own country."

"Are you sure it is he?"

"Perfectly sure. The telescope is an excellent one. Besides I should have recognised Tichdorf merely by his red whiskers, which are like the fans of a windmill. Ah! the rascal! This time he won't go off as he came, and not later than this very night——"

"Let us have a look," said Julien, now taking Robert's place at the telescope.

"It's most peculiar," muttered the priest; "with the bare eye I seem to recognise both the horse and man."

"It's Wassmann!" exclaimed Julien.

"Ah! I knew I was not mistaken," replied M. Jean. "Besides he comes to that same spot almost every evening."

"And I, gentlemen," said the poacher; "I maintain that the fellow is my man Tichdorf. Do you think I could forget the face of a man who robbed me, betrayed me, sold me up?"

"Neither can one forget a wretch who has murdered and poisoned," interrupted Julien; "but we are both right—Tichdorf and Wassmann are one and the same!"

"What! Wassmann, the man up at the pavilion! the fellow who ——"

"Who killed Michel ; yes, the man whose infernal cunning almost sent you to the scaffold. He called himself Tichdorf five years ago when he gave you up to the police ; but he changed his name to return to France."

"All right !" said Robert, between his teeth ; "he has a good reckoning to pay."

"What an unheard of adventure," exclaimed the priest, who had been looking through the telescope ; "like you, I am now sure that it is Wassmann, but I cannot make out how a man can have played so many different parts in Paris in so few years without any one suspecting him."

"We are so trustful, and so silly, we Frenchmen," said Julien, bitterly ; "don't you know that for the last ten years Prussia has not ceased sending spies here, spies under all sorts of disguises. Besides, Robert has more to tell us, and we shall probably learn many things we are still ignorant of. How did you happen to know this Tichdorf ?"

"I saw him for the first time, a long while ago, when I was in garrison at Colmar. It was said there that he had come from Baden. He led a very fast life and was always thick with the non-commissioned officers ; he stood them good dinners, and gave the soldiers plenty of drink."

"Dash it ! then he had already begun his trade of spy, and now I think of it, it was then he must have met Michel Amstein."

"Not at that time, but later on. He was always going about Alsace, especially in the garrison towns ; so much so that every one distrusted him, from what I heard long afterwards ; too late for me, unfortunately, for I had met him again in Paris, where he pretended to be in business ; he shewed me a deal of attention, and I went into partnership with him. You know the rest."

"Did you ever meet, either at his house, or with him, a young girl —"

"No, an old one, or rather a middle-aged woman, who managed a liquor shop for him on the Boulevard du Temple, and who passed for having been his mistress. I think he brought her from Metz."

"Poor Mademoiselle Rose also came from Metz," said M. Jean.

"Was she fair, stout, a little pimpled ?" asked Robert.

"Yes, just so."

"That's her ! This woman was his mere tool, and apparently was well acquainted with his spying practices. I heard in England that she had disappeared at the same time as he did."

"And he evidently brought her back, when he returned to France, under another name, and set up at Charly. He took the Café du Grand Vainqueur for her, so as to hear what went on in the village. We know how the café served him in poor Michel's case."

"The unhappy woman paid dearly for her guilty complaisance," said the curé, softly.

"It only remains for us to discover the true personality of his pretended daughter," replied Julien. "At present you know that Wassmann was formerly called Tichdorf. Can you guess, Robert, who that girl Catherine could be—that Catherine who was so cruelly treated by the rascal ?"

"I never saw her, so I can say nothing about it. During his earlier stay in Paris, when we were partners, he had neither wife nor daughter with him. But I would wager that this girl Catherine you speak of was the child of some worthy people with whom he once lodged at Colmar. I remember that in my time they had a child of that name. Naturally she must have grown up, and when Tichdorf returned to Alsace, he perhaps seduced her, and took her away with him."

"Very likely. So this last victim of Wassmann's was French, like the others."

"Another reason why I should kill him," said Robert, seizing hold of his Remington, which he had placed in a corner.

"What are you going to do, my friend?" asked M. Jean.

"I have just told you, your reverence," replied Robert; "I am going to crush a venomous reptile—to kill Tichdorf."

"But I hope you don't think of attacking him among all the Prussian soldiers?"

"It would not be the first time I have picked off one of the sentries on their lines. But in Tichdorf's case I shall leave nothing to chance, and I have another plan. The ruffian will cross the river to-night, I'll answer for it."

"It is highly probable," replied Julien, who had taken the poacher's place at the telescope. "He has just placed his horse in charge of a soldier, who is leading it away, and he is now talking to some sharpshooters hidden behind that fringe of poplars. Daylight is waning; there must be a boat hidden somewhere by the bank."

"Yes," replied the priest; "they have a boat over yonder behind the willow tree which bends over the water."

"It's just as I thought," replied Robert. "I know now what I have to do. You may reckon that this night poor Michel will be avenged."

"May I go with you?" asked Julien, excitedly.

The poacher hesitated for an instant before replying, but he ended by saying "No; I'd rather not. To work properly, I must be quite alone. Excuse me, sir, if I refuse you, but this scoundrel may defend himself, and if he is to do any further mischief to anybody, I don't want it to be to you."

"And if he kills you?" asked Julien.

"If he kills me, the loss won't be very great; but I feel certain that he won't kill me."

"Besides are you not obliged to return to your battalion this evening?" said M. Jean, turning towards Julien.

"I did mean to go, but in point of fact I have forty-eight hours' leave."

"Very well, you must spend twenty-four of them with me," exclaimed the curé, joyously. "You must remember that you belong to the regular army, and that a soldier's first duty is to be killed at his post, and nowhere else. You have no right to undertake any expeditions on your own account."

"Yes, sir," said Robert; "it seems to me that his reverence is right. Let me ply my calling as a *franc-tireur*, and I promise you that all will go well."

"Ah! if I only had my chassépot," murmured La Chanterie.

"Yes, but you haven't got it," replied the priest, "and you won't give me the pain of remaining all alone this evening when I so rarely see you?"

"All right, I'll stay; but if Robert is not successful to-night, I shall tackle Wassmann to-morrow on my own account."

"I will try to save you the trouble of doing so," muttered the ex-poacher. "Good-bye, gentlemen."

"At least, promise me," cried M. Jean, "that you will come to-morrow morning and reassure us, for I shall not feel easy till I see you again."

"I promise you," said Robert, and forthwith he darted down the stairs.

Julien made a movement as if to follow him, but the priest held his arm, and whispered to him: "Your uncle and cousin would never forgive you if you took part in a nocturnal expedition against this man. After what has passed between you two it would be almost murder."

The young fellow was silent; he quite realised that it would not look well

for him to watch for his personal enemy, and kill him in Red Indian fashion. A few minutes later, the priest and Julien, from their high position on the clock tower, where they remained till the close of the day, saw Robert walk quietly along the high road, stop in front of the open gate of the Pavillon des Sorbiers, and finally disappear behind the garden walls.

"He thinks that Wassmann goes to visit his old house at night time, and he means to await him there," said M. Jean. "He is perhaps not far wrong."

All was now still on both banks of the Marne, which seemed perfectly deserted. Night fell, and the priest and Julien left their observatory to return to the parsonage, where they passed a somewhat sad evening together. After supping frugally, for food was already growing scarce, and discussing both the past and the future, they retired to rest at an early hour, promising to meet in the belfry tower at dawn. Julien could not close his eyes all night. He thought every minute that he should hear some shots fired in the direction of the Pavillon des Sorbiers, but he was mistaken; the night proved exceptionally quiet. You would have thought that you were sixty miles from the enemy's outposts.

The silence worried La Chanterie as to the poacher's fate, and M. Jean no doubt shared in his fears, for he came to rouse his guest, before daybreak, to propose that they should return to their post of observation. They each of them thought that Robert had been killed or taken prisoner, but did not confide their impressions to one another.

They had been for a quarter of an hour at the signal window of the steeple, and the silvery light of dawn was rising over the horizon, when Julien, who was already looking through the telescope, exclaimed, "I think I see him. Yes, he is standing up, leaning against the gate near which poor Catherine expired. Yes, yes, it's certainly he. I recognise his large hood and broad-brimmed felt hat. What the deuce is he doing there?"

"He is no doubt waiting for Wassmann, but he will be killed, the foolish fellow, for opposite him, at less than two hundred yards, all the left bank of the Marne is covered with German sentinels hidden behind the trees, and he will be a target for them as soon as day breaks."

"They won't wait for daylight; I have just seen a little puff of smoke rising from behind the willows. Listen!"

At this moment the ping of a rifle-shot broke upon the deep silence of the twilight.

"Happily, they have missed him," said Julien, still at the telescope. "Having been warned like that, he will surely pack off."

"God be praised!" muttered the priest.

"No, he is still there—he must be mad; he might, at any rate, reply to the fire. But no; his Remington is beside him, and he doesn't even touch it; he must mean to be killed."

"Ah, they are firing again! They are all firing; they are firing in volleys!" cried M. Jean, excitedly, pointing to a large cloud of smoke rising above the river-bank.

"He falls—he has fallen!" replied La Chanterie. "This time they have not missed him, the rascals. There's one more of Wassmann's victims!"

"Poor Robert!" murmured the vicar, kneeling down to pray.

"I will avenge him," said Julien, shaking his fist at the Germans. "Wassmann has the best of it just now, but it won't be for long; I will kill him or he shall kill me. But who would ever have suspected such imprudence, on the part of this unlucky fellow, to place himself within pistol-shot of the Prussian lines!"

M. Jean had risen. He had finished his prayer and was gazing sadly at the high road, which stretched away at the foot of the steeple. "It is most peculiar," he muttered suddenly; "there is a man just leaving the pavilion and coming in this direction."

Indeed! exclaimed La Chanterie, leaving his telescope and leaning out of the Gothic window; "why, he looks like a Prussian. Do you see his flat cap with a red border? Ah! if it is one of those ruffians, who has had the audacity to stroll about Charly after killing our poor Robert, he shall pay for it."

"Wait a bit! he is waving his gun as if making a sign to us. If it were ——"

"Well, really—his figure and his breadth of shoulders ——"

"He is taking off his cap—he is bowing to us—really I am not mistaken; it is Robert!"

Julien, who had also recognised the poacher, replied by a shout of delight, and hurried down the stairs. The priest followed as quickly as his old legs would allow him; and they met the poacher at the church porch, and embraced him warmly.

"We thought you were dead," said La Chanterie. "What has happened, then? Just now, as we saw you dressed like that, we did not recognise you."

"Ah! yes, on account of the cap with the red band. It is Tichdorf's," replied Robert, coolly

"What! Tichdorf's! but I thought I saw you fall, struck by several rifle bullets over yonder at the end of the pavilion garden ——"

"It was Tichdorf who fell."

"Tichdorf! Wassmann! that's impossible."

"Excuse me—it cost me a new felt hat and overcoat, but we are at last rid of the rascal. His good friends the Prussians have put a bullet in his head and two in his chest, that just makes up his reckoning for the three persons he sent into the other world."

"Come—explain yourself! I can't understand."

"I realise that. Yesterday evening I had no time to talk to you of my plan. In these cases I have a method of my own, which never fails. I don't like to use my gun; it makes a noise and attracts attention. But I always carry side-arms and a cord with a running noose about me."

"And you surprised Wassmann?"

"Well, I was pretty sure that he would cross the Marne in a boat, and pay a visit to his old country house, where he perhaps has some secret hiding-place of his own. So I planted myself quietly against the wall at the bottom of the garden, just inside the little gate. I said to myself, "If he brings anyone with him, I won't stir from my corner; I shall let him pass in, and try to catch him afterwards; but I felt almost sure that he would come alone. And I wasn't mistaken, only I had to wait a long while. It was past midnight when I heard some talking in German on the towing-path. The soldier who had rowed Tichdorf over was taking his orders before returning. I leant forward to look, and saw a man climbing the ascent alone. Thereupon, I drew back and got my cord ready. The rest went on castors, I may say. At the minute he passed through the gateway I threw my noose round his neck, and I pulled hard. He fell like a slaughtered ox; I had half strangled him at the first effort."

"He was not dead, however, as——"

"No, fortunately, for I had a little plan of my own. I might have killed him with my hunting knife, but it went against me to do so. However, I bound

him tightly, hands and feet, with another bit of cord which I had in my pocket, then I gagged him with my worsted belt, and when I felt quiet sure he could neither move nor cry out, I loosened the noose. He came to himself again, and then I took the pleasure of whispering my name, and a couple of words as to the old reckoning we had to settle. He could not answer me, but I heard him grind his teeth."

After telling him all I had at heart, I dragged him outside, raised him in my arms, placed him upright against the gate, and tied him there, so that he could not fall. Then I took his cap and cloak, and I put my felt hat on his head, my overcoat over his shoulders. Finally, I again hid behind the wall, and remained there till daybreak. I wanted to see the end of the play."

"How horrible!" muttered M. Jean.

"Horrible, yes; but he richly deserved it. I repeat that I had calculated correctly, for, soon as it grew light, the German sentries saw a man leaning against the garden gate. They took him for a Frenchman—a *franc-tireur*—and fired several shots, which did not miss aim. That was all I wished. Tichdorf deserved some German lead. As soon as I felt sure that he was dead I came away, and here I am."

Julien had listened composedly to this terrible story, which made the good priest tremble. "God has punished Michel's murderer," now said the Count de Brannes's nephew.

"Alas! are we quite sure it was he?" replied M. Jean, seized with pity and a lingering scruple which the description of Wassmann's fate had awakened in his mind.

"What, your reverence, are you still dubious after so many proofs?"

"Do what I will, Michel's last words always return to me, and——"

"What was it that Michel said before he expired?" asked Robert.

"He muttered some inarticulate syllables," replied Julien. "He muttered something like this: 'It is the prr, the po, the p——'"

"And his reverence thinks that he meant to say: 'It is the poacher!'"

"Yes, I own it; the word Michel tried to say certainly began with a p, and——"

"But Michel was an Alsatian," exclaimed Robert; "and he spoke in a queer sort of way."

"Yes, he did."

"Then I have it; he meant to say 'the Prussian.' Yes, that must have been it; he couldn't get at the sound distinctly, being at his last gasp."

"It's curious we didn't think of that before now," said Julien. "But you are undoubtedly right, Robert. Michel meant to say the Prussian; and by the Prussian he meant Tichdorf, or Wassmann, if you like it better—Wassmann, who pretended to be an Austrian, and thus led us astray."

The priest began to pray softly. He thanked Providence for having relieved him of the weight which had still oppressed his conscience, and he bowed in reverence before the Justice of Heaven.

* * * * *

Julien de la Chanterie married Gabrielle a year after the war between France and Germany came to a close. Henri de Brannes is now a major, and at times still thinks of poor Catherine; his father, the count, has taken Robert for his head-keeper, and the poachers have a hard time of it, in contending with a man who was formerly one of themselves.

Eugénie is also installed at Chasseneuil, with her children. She has regained her husband's and the little ones their father's affection. They are all very happy. M. Jean is finishing Marcel's education and will make a man of him. The Cormiers are no longer in debt and seem in a fair way to make their fortune, but usury has ruined Vétillet; and Digonnard is just now working out a term of hard labour in New Caledonia. God is just.

Fabrégue has again enlisted in the cavalry and gained his epaulettes. Du Tremblay is a sub-prefect. The tribe of Red Indians has dispersed. As for the charming village of Charly-sous-Bois, it now bears no traces of the havoc wrought by warfare, and the Café du Grand Vainqueur has changed hands; but the people of the neighbourhood still talk at times of Mademoiselle Rose's artful Thumb Stroke.

THE END.

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"Mrs. Sheldon at the very beginning of the book tells us that Hamilcar's soldiers were enjoying a feast given to them 'by the grand council,' whereas Flaubert says plainly that they gave it to themselves. When Flaubert writes 'soft kisses,' Mrs. Sheldon traduces him by making him say 'savory kisses.' 'Enfoncer' she renders by immerse, while such words as coiffure and cothurne she leaves untranslated. . . . In the central situation of the book—the scene between Matho, the barbarian chief, and Salammbô, who has gone to his tent by direction of the Carthaginian high priest to recover from him the holy veil of which he has possessed himself—there is a passage which, if the story is to be told at all, ought not to be altered; but which Mrs. Sheldon has changed so as to render it unintelligible. We have Flaubert's authority for stating that Matho, on this occasion, took Salammbô 'by the heels.' Mrs. Sheldon only tells us that he 'seized her in a frantic embrace,' which, besides being no translation, is somewhat meaningless—especially in connection with certain golden chainlets which snapped in such a way that 'the two ends flew apart, striking against the tent like two leaping vipers.'"—*St. James's Gazette*.

"We wonder how the vexed spirit of him who kept a private record of human absurdities would enjoy the new translation of 'Salammbô' by M. F. Sheldon? 'The soldiers whom he had commanded in Sicily had been accorded by the Grand Council a great feast,' &c.—there is an example (from the first page) in which style has hardly been mastered by the translator. Again, 'silver cymbals, hitting her cheeks, peuded from her ears'—that is scarcely the kind of English that Flaubert's French deserves for a change of raiment. Or look at this: 'The inspired terrors, more than the walls, defend such sanctuaries.' 'The water gradually rose till it almost reached the superior stones.' 'She resaw him in the tent.' The translation is full of these flowers of style."—*Daily News*.

"Perhaps Mr. Sheldon's 'Salammbô' is not the very worst translation from the French that ever was published. It is certainly the worst we have ever seen.

So helpless is the translator, that though he declares he has 'Englished' the original, he has really left unrendered the French words most apt to trip up the ordinary British reader. . . . What shall the reader think when he learns that Hamilcar's doors were 'protected from scorpions by brass grillages'? . . . As to 'trellises of golden baguettes,' he will give it up in despair. Nor will he have a very vivid picture of what is going on when he is told that the soldiers 'ate as they squatted on their haunches round large plateaus.' . . . If Mr. Sheldon had chanced to possess even a mediocre knowledge of English he would have used the word 'platters.'

"Perhaps we have shown, from the evidence of the first few pages, that, whatever Mr. Sheldon has done to 'Salammbô,' at all events he has not 'Englished' it. Neither his style nor his words are English. . . . For example, in the second line he says that a feast 'had been accorded by the Grand Council' to the soldiers. Flaubert writes, 'Les soldats se donnaient un grand festin.' When Mr. Sheldon adds that the park 'environed a court,' he is apparently writing American. There is no excuse for the expression in French. When Mr. Sheldon says ludicrously that the fires in the garden 'imparted to the vicinity the appearance of a battlefield upon which the dead were being hurned,' he is Englishing 'et l'on voyait au milieu du jardin, comme sur un champ de bataille quand on brûle les morts,' and so forth. His 'English' about 'imparting to the vicinity' would shock the humblest peuny-a-liner.

"We need pursue no longer the tedious task of proving that this so-called translation is written by a person who seems almost equally devoid of literary knowledge either of English or French. The book is worthless as a rendering of Flaubert's elaborate performance. It is not to be called English; it certainly is not French. We have no means of deciding whether or not it is good American, but we incline to think that American critics, too, will fail to recognise their own language."—*Saturday Review*.

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